FEBRUARY 1993

Asimov's SCIENCE FICTION

Mary Rosenblum ▪ Tony Daniel ▪ Avram Davidson
Maureen F. McHugh ▪ Gregory Frost

DAVID LEIKAM
530 KENDALL 1
PALO ALTO CA 94306-2720

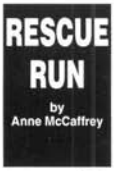
AB
06 MAPR93 ASF ED 00000
06LIK 21530 /KEN9X 22
*****5-DIGIT 94306

.50 U.S./$3.25 CAN.
02
36006
0 387167 6

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

6916 $12.98x

8425 $21.95/**$8.98**



7278 **$6.98x**

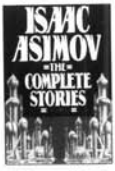
8466* $27.95/**$14.98**

8433 $22.00/**$10.98**

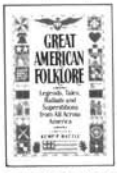
6973 $20.00/**$10.98**

7062+ $20.00/**$9.98**

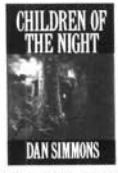
8763++ $18.50/**$7.98**



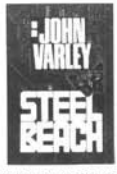
7989 **$10.98x**



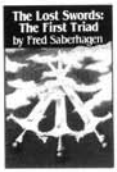
2667 $16.95/**$10.98**



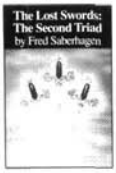
8169* $21.95/**$10.98**



8219* $21.95/**$11.98**

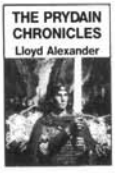


7260 *Woundhealer's Story, Sightblinder's Story, Stonecutter's Story* $45.85#/**$12.98**



5017 *Farslayer's Story, Coinspinner's Story, Mindsword's Story* $50.85#/**$13.98**

4747 *So You Want to Be a Wizard, Deep Wizardry, High Wizardry* $45.85#/**$12.98**



5595 All 5 novels plus *The Foundling & Other Stories* $83.70#/**$14.98**

7609* *The Book of the Damned, The Book of the Beast* $39.90#/**$10.98**

8508 *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows. Summoned to Journey* **$12.98x**

HERE'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU JOIN...

A GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION. Once your membership's accepted, we'll send the 5 BOOKS you've chosen. If you're not 100% satisfied with them, return the books within 10 days *at our expense.* Membership will be canceled and you'll owe nothing.

HUGE DISCOUNTS ON HARDCOVER BOOKS. Save as much as 65% off publishers' hardcover edition prices. Club books are sometimes altered in size to fit special presses.

THE FREE CLUB MAGAZINE. You'll receive up to 16 issues a year. Each issue reviews the Featured Book Selection(s) plus a wide variety of alternate books from the Club's extensive library.

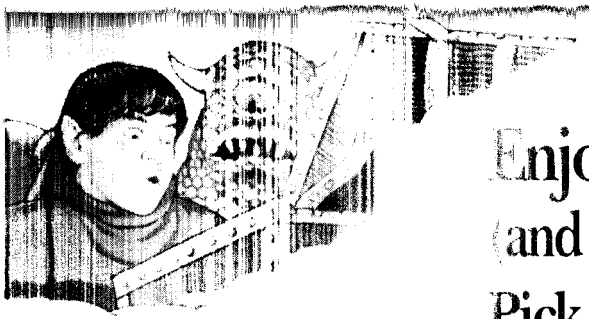
SHOPPING MADE SIMPLE. To get the Featured Book Selection(s), *do nothing*—it will be sent automatically. If you prefer another book—or none at all—simply return your Member Reply Form by the specified date. A shipping and handling charge (and sales tax, where applicable) is added to each order.

AN EASY-TO-MEET OBLIGATION. Take up to 2 years to buy 4 more books at regular low Club prices. Afterwards, you may resign membership anytime.

RISK-FREE RETURN PRIVILEGES. If you get an unwanted book because your Club magazine was delayed and you had less than 10 days to respond, simply return the book *at our expense.*

+ Copyright © 1992 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved. STAR TREK is a Registered Trademark of Paramount Pictures.
++ ® & © 1992 Lucasfilm Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Used Under Authorization. ◊ Dangerous Journeys™ is a registered trademark of Omega Helios Ltd.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Enjoy your elf (and other beings). Pick 5 for $1 when you join now!

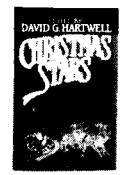
8177* $19.95 $10.98

8201* $11.98x

5678 $7.98x

4994 $7.98x

8524 $17.00/$8.98



8227 $8.98x

5652 *Dragon's Gold, Serpent's Silver, Chimaera's Copper* **$14.98x**

5660 *Orc's Opal, Weaver's Refuge* 537.90+ $12.98

6999 $15.00/$7.98

6163 $20.00/$10.98

7013 $19.00/$8.98

7286 $21.95/$7.98

Prices in fine print are publishers' hardcover editions.
Prices in bold print are Club hardcover editions.

Combined publishers' editions * Explicit scenes and/or language
x Hardcover edition exclusively for Club members

THE Science Fiction BOOK CLUB®

Reading That's Worlds Apart

MAIL TO: *The Science Fiction Book Club*
6550 East 30th Street, P.O. Box 6367
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6367

Please write book numbers here:

YES! Please enroll me in *The Science Fiction Book Club* according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 5 BOOKS I've indicated. Bill me just $1, plus shipping and handling.

SAVE MORE—BUY YOUR FIRST BOOK NOW FOR $2.98
☐ Send me the book I've indicated and reduce my commitment to only 3 more books. Bill me an additional $2.98, plus shipping and handling.

(write book number)

37848 33

37849 31

Mr./Mrs.
Miss/Ms. _____
(please print)

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

If you're under 18, your parent must sign here: _____

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application.

ASI 2/93

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

42

Asimov's SCIENCE FICTION

Vol. 17 No. 2 (Whole Number 197)
February 1993
Next Issue on Sale
February 5, 1993

90

118

Novelettes

8 Entrada — MaryRosenblum
56 One Morning in the Looney Bin — Maggie Flinn
98 Some Things Are Better Left — Gregory Frost
140 Aconcagua — Tony Daniel

Short Stories

42 A Handful of Hatchlings — M.C. Sumner
90 A Coney Island of the Mind — Maureen F. McHugh
118 Everything that Rises, Must Converge — Michael Armstrong
130 Sea-Scene, or, Vergil and the Ox-Thrall — Avram Davidson

Departments

4 Letters
169 On Books — Baird Searles
176 The SF Conventional Calendar — Erwin S. Strauss

Poems by David Lunde and Wendy Rathbone

Cover by E.T. Steadman

Stories from *Asimov's* have won nineteen Hugos and nineteen Nebula Awards, and our editors have received eight Hugo Awards for Best Editor. *Asimov's* was also the 1992 recipient of the *Locus* Award for Best Magazine.

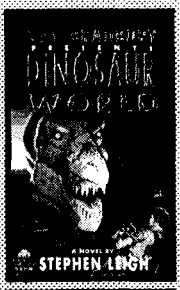
Isaac Asimov: Editorial Director (1977–1992)
Gardner Dozois: Editor **Sheila Williams:** Managing Editor
Christoph Haas-Heye: President & Publisher **Terri Czeczko:** Art Director

Published every 28 days which includes special issues in April and November by Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, at $2.50 per copy ($3.25 per copy in Canada). One year subscription $34.95 in the United States and U.S. possessions. In all other countries $40.50. (GST included in Canada) payable in advance in U.S. funds. Address for subscriptions and all other correspondence about them, P.O. Box 7058, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. For back issues send $3.50 to Asimov's Science Fiction, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462. Address for all editorial matters: Asimov's Science Fiction, 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10168-0035. Asimov's Science Fiction is the registered trademark of Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines.

© 1993 by Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

Second class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. POSTMASTER, send change of address to Asimov's Science Fiction, Box 7058, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. In Canada return to 3255 Wyandotte Street East, Windsor, Ontario N8Y 1E9. ISSN 1055-2146. GST #R123293128

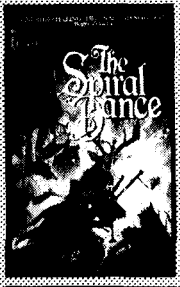
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



RAY BRADBURY PRESENTS DINOSAUR WORLD

by Stephen Leigh

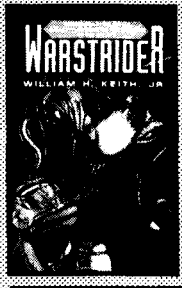
The second volume in Avon's dynamic new series based on the work of Ray Bradbury, "The number one wizard of American science fiction writing for 40 years."—*People*



THE SPIRAL DANCE

by R. Garcia y Robertson

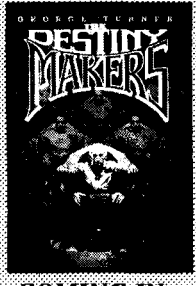
Called "original and brilliant" by Roger Zelazny, THE SPIRAL DANCE is a beautifully written, compelling fantasy of Elizabethan Scotland.



WARSTRIDER

by William H. Keith Jr.

An electrifying new military science fiction series involving hostile aliens and an awesome system of mind-power that may be humanity's only hope.



THE DESTINY MAKERS

by George Turner

From the Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning author of *The Drowning Towers* comes a thought-provoking examination of the future. "George Turner is the best-kept secret in contemporary SF." — Ed Bryant

An Avonova Book/William Morrow Hardcover

COMING IN FEBRUARY 1993

AVON BOOKS
The Hearst Corporation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LETTERS

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I am writing to you to express my deepest appreciation for the good deed which you did for me a year ago.

I wrote to you asking for help locating books from the "V" television series, and you generously printed my letter in the May issue of your wonderful magazine.

As a result of your good deed and kind heart, I was swamped with responses. I received not only many, many letters, but a lot of books.

I have also made some very close friendships with people who helped me.

I cannot possibly tell you how extremely happy you have made me, and I will be eternally grateful to you.

While I'm at it, I also must thank all of your generous readers for their help and support. I tried to write and thank most of them personally, but some addresses were too hard for me to read.

I shall never forget the service that you have done for me, and I hope to see your magazine in braille for many years to come.

Gratefully yours,

Ann Tate
Elkview, WY

Dear Dr. Asimov,

Daneel *and* Foundation! A puzzle to be solved and psychohistory too! A tour de force!

The Master reigns!

Congratulations and thanks.

Sincerely,

Mike Connolly
Weehawken, NJ

Dear Dr. Asimov,

Although I enjoy your magazine, I usually skip most of the Letters column, so I have to credit my husband, Rick Brodzinsky, with bringing my attention to Lou Judson's letter in the April 1992 issue.

There are two possible solutions to the problem of a garage overburdened with boxes of books and magazines. Because of budget cuts, some local libraries are resorting to fund raisers such as used book sales, and if so, the staff could certainly advise one whether a particular donation would be helpful.

In other countries, there are many individuals, Peace Corp volunteers, and school libraries who are extremely grateful for reading materials in English. If one is willing to package up and mail reading material abroad, a very helpful matching service is the International Book Project, Inc. Any potential sender can just write describing what he or she is interested in sending, and IBP will try to offer one or more potential

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recipients. There is no fee, they only request that you tell them what you've sent to whom. In addition, one might make a friend or a science fiction convert! This is a great way to recycle. The address is:

Mrs. Terry Bailey
Office Manager
International Book Project, Inc.
1440 Delaware Avenue
Lexington, KY 40505

Of course we've never sent any of your books abroad, Dr. Asimov, since they are read and reread in this house.

Sincerely,

Jacquelyn Bazley
Union City, CA

Dr. Asimov:

I would like to correct the misinformation Kim Baker gave to you and the readers of *Asimov's* (April 1992). She says she saw a talk show with Mormon men and their multiple wives whose obvious goal was over-population. I am a "Mormon," which means that I am a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Let me tell you; "Mormons" do not have plural wives. That is called polygamy and we gave that up long ago. The people who practice that are called Fundamentalists—they are not "Mormons." They are also rather a minority. This may seem obvious, but it's not. Let me illustrate.

There's the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS Church)—the "Mormons." There's the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (RLDS Church)—they don't do polygamy either. And there are several splinter groups (the Singer/Swapp fam-

GARDNER DOZOIS:
Editor
SHEILA WILLIAMS:
Managing Editor
IAN RANDAL STROCK:
Associate Editor
SCOTT L. TOWNER:
Assistant Editor
JEAN TRAINA:
Design Director
TERRI CZECZKO:
Art Director
ANTHONY BARI:
Junior Designer
MARILYN ROBERTS:
Senior Production Manager
CAROLE DIXON:
Production Manager
CYNTHIA MANSON:
Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights
CONSTANCE SCARBOROUGH:
Contracts Manager
BARBARA PARROTT:
Director of Newsstand Circulation
BRUCE SCHWARTZ:
Director of Circulation Subscription Sales
DENNIS JONES:
Operations Manager Subscription Sales
DAVID MENDELSON:
Renewal & Billing Manager Subscription Sales
FRED SABLOFF:
Advertising Sales Director
JUDY DORMAN:
Advertising and Classified Advertising Coordinator

ISAAC ASIMOV
Editorial Director
(1977–1992)

CHRISTOPH HAAS-HEYE
President & Publisher
Dell Magazines

JACK HOEFT
President & CEO
Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc

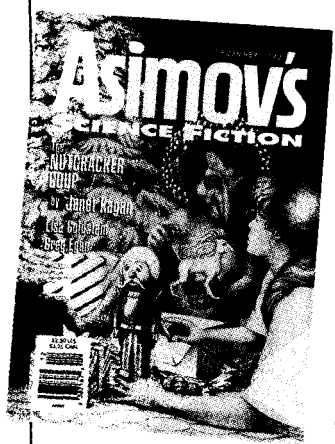
ADVERTISING OFFICES
NEW YORK
(212) 856-6306

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE
Dresner Direct Inc., N.Y., N.Y. (212)889-1078

Please do not send us your manuscript until you've gotten a copy of our manuscript guidelines. To obtain this, send us a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope), and a note requesting this information. Please write "manuscript guidelines" in the bottom left-hand corner of the outside envelope. The address for this and for all editorial correspondence is *Asimov's*, Dell Magazines, 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10168-0035. While we're always looking for new writers, please, in the interest of time-saving, find out what we're looking for, and how to prepare it, before submitting your story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A special offer for Science Fiction fans . . .



- ❑ Please send me 18 issues for only $29.95--I save over 28% off the basic price.
- ❑ Please send me 12 issues for only $20.97.

- ❑ Bill Me
- ❑ Payment enclosed

Name._____

Address_____

City_____ State____ Zip_____

For Immediate Subscription Service Call
TOLL FREE 1-800-333-4108

P.O. Box 7057, Red Oak, Iowa 51591

Outside US & Poss. 12 for $27.97, 18 for $39.97. (cash with order US funds). Price Includes GST
Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for your first issue.

We publish two double issues in April and November.
Each double issue counts as two issues towards your subscription.

HRSD-3

ily, Ervil LeBaron, etc.) who practice polygamy and other oddities.

In the *LDS* Church, members are encouraged to have large families, just as they are encouraged to serve others and live like Christ. A high birthrate is not *our* only goal, as it may be in some splinter groups.

I am not a member of a church that practices polygamy and am tired of people ignorantly categorizing all mutations of the LDS Church as "Mormons."

Rebecca Eagar
Salt Lake City, UT

To the Editor:

Regarding Mike Resnick's story "The Light that Blinds, the Claws that Catch" in the July issue:

Mr. Resnick finds it amusing to idly speculate that history would "weep" if one famous man (Teddy Roosevelt) had sacrificed his potential and the possibilities of his life by choosing instead to devote himself to the needs of his spouse.

I find it far more likely that history weeps for the billions of women who have done exactly that for thousands of years.

Mr. Resnick suggests that history weeps over the loss of Roosevelt's political and wartime glories. But that hole in history is miniscule—in fact irrelevant—when compared to the scientific discoveries, artistic works, groundbreaking inventions, diplomatic triumphs, and social advances that are missing because women throughout history never had the chance to do any of those things. Could you imagine how the world would be different today if

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

half the human race had been allowed the same opportunities to learn, create, and discover as the other half? That's an alternate history I would like to read—but I would rather that it were true.

Just an observation.

Diane G. Olbris
Storrs, CT

Mr. Dozois,

As a long time subscriber I find it hard to believe it's been fifteen years since your magazine began. Congratulations and here's looking toward another fifteen and more. Keep up the good work.

I've just finished "Even the Queen" by Connie Willis and found it to be one of the best stories I've read in some time. Humor in science fiction is tough to carry off especially when dealing with the type of subject Ms. Willis chose to handle.

I was easily able to relate to the story as I've a close friend who every month tells me repeatedly for several days just how lucky I am to be a man. That's when she's not praying I come back as a woman, or wondering why God didn't give men ovaries too.

David Kveragas
Clarks Summit, PA

Dear Isaac, if I may be so familiar,

I'm just a few pages into Connie Willis's story "Even the Queen" and just had to stop reading to tell you what an absolute DELIGHT it is.

I've just recently re-subscribed to your magazine after several years hiatus and now see that I've been missing what is, to me, a marvelous new authoress.

I hope she's welded to her word processor, batting out yet another delightful, woman oriented story!

Sincerely,

Mary Davidson
Salley, SC

A new Connie Willis short story collection will be out from Bantam Books early next year. It will contain a number of stories that first appeared in Asimov's.

—Sheila Williams

ANNOUNCEMENT

For a collection of Isaac Asimov's letters, Stanley Asimov—the author's brother—would appreciate seeing photocopies of any interesting postcards from Isaac to his readers. Disposable copies of postcards should be sent to: Stanley Asimov, % Asimov's Science Fiction magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168-0035.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ENTRADA

Mary Rosenblum

This April, Del Rey will release Mary Rosenblum's first novel, *The Drylands*, as part of its Discovery program. Some of the unforgettable characters who debuted in Ms. Rosenblum's early Dryland stories: "Water Bringer" (March 1991); "Celilo" (June 1991); and "The Bee Man" (September 1991), will also be appearing in this book.

art: Alan M. Clark

LICENSED TO UCIZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The rail was half empty, this early in the morning. Head aching, Mila Aguilar stared through the smeared window. Tract houses slid past below the concrete span—*los burbios,* acres of dust and junk, blotched with green wherever people could afford the water for crops. No gang on the rail today, thank God. Just techs on their way in to their shifts at the fed-med clinics, child-care workers and service personnel. Asians. Latinos. A few blacks. No one looked at her. You don't look—not unless you're asking for trouble.

The air smelled like piss and sweat and old plastic, as if it had been shut up in this car for weeks, breathed over and over again. It choked her suddenly, filled her with a squeezing claustrophobia that made the headache worse. Trapped. Every day of her working life she had taken this ride. She would do so until the end of her days, unless she found a way out. She clutched the grimy seat-back as they roller-coastered through the east hills. Little Cambodia slid by beneath the concrete tracks, a green patchwork of expensively watered vegetable plots. A flash of bright color caught her eye. Painted onto a crumbling highway overpass, Asian men and women fought strangling vines beneath tranquil blossoms.

Samuel Lujan had painted that mural. She had leaned over the crumbling wall in the middle of a hot night, watching those painted faces come to life beneath his hissing brush. They had made love afterward—right there on the overpass, cushioned by their tangled clothes. His long hair had showered down around her, and, on that night, in that time and place, it had seemed that they would be together forever. There could be no other way for them to live.

But Sam had wanted out, too; out of the *Barrio.* He had chosen his door, and had walked through it. She had not followed. Mila's stomach clenched as the mural slid backward out of sight. The rail arched up and over the river and the city towers rose to swallow them; so clean and bright after *los burbios,* surrounded by their well-watered park-blocks. Their shadows swallowed the rail, and hunger stirred in Mila's belly. But it wasn't food that she craved. Those towers meant freedom. They meant escape. There were *doors* in those towers—for her, for Mila Aguilar. All you needed was an *entrada*; a way inside.

And she had found one. Mila slung her uniform bag over her shoulder and pushed her way down the aisle as the rail whispered to a stop. Orange plastic seats, grimy graffittied walls, a crumpled condom wrapper on the gray composite floor; these were the images of morning, of hurry, of another precious step away from the *Barrio* and *los burbios.* Put your card in the slot, touch in your number and run, because you're going to be late. A transit cop stared at her. Cops always stared if you were running and you weren't white. Lots of cops *here,* public and private.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No gangs. No blades. Amelia Connor-Vanek's tower rose like a snowy mountain from its garden. She lived at the top, the old *bruja*. At the very top, where no one could look down at her except God.

Invisible security opened the door for Mila and closed it after her. It let her cross the carpeted lobby and opened the door of the lift. Mila combed her fingers through her short hair as the lift rose upward, shifting her bag to her other shoulder. By the time she got into her uniform, she would be late after all. But you didn't wear any kind of medical uniform on the street.

Ginger was waiting in the apartment anteroom, already dressed in her street clothes. "Rail running late again? The old girl's still asleep." She tossed her blonde head. "Bloodchem and bio-stats are normal. She was a case, last night. I had to call in a massage therapist at two AM! How do you *stand* her on days?" Ginger rolled her eyes. "If she puts her hand on my ass one more time, I'm quitting." She scooped up her uniform bag and a palm-top reader. "See you tonight."

"See you, Ginger." Mila went on into the apartment and peeked into the old *bruja's* bedroom.

Still asleep, and the monitor displays were okay. Mila stripped in the enormous living-room, slowly and without haste. The handwoven carpet tickled her bare feet as she pulled on her uniform coverall. These were the symbols of escape; silk upholstery, wool carpet, the breathtaking view from this tower room. The headache had faded at last, but the hunger was always there. Always.

Are you there? Amelia's voice came over the comm on Mila's belt, shrill and querulous. *I've called you twice, damn it. I don't pay you to be late.*

"I'm sorry, *Señora,*" Mila called out. Bullshit, on that *twice*. She quickly sealed the front of her coverall. "The rail was late. I'm coming right away."

"How many times do I have to tell you that if you want to say more than *Yes, Señora* to me, you do it in person?" Leaning back in her reclining bed, Amelia Connor-Vanek's gray eyes snapped as Mila came through the door. "I pay you for your physical presence, my dear. I already *have* a monitor."

The old *bruja* was in one of *those* moods. "Yes, *Señora*," Mila murmured. "I'm sorry, *Señora*." The old woman looked like something dead, all wrinkled and ugly, no cosmetic work at all, and she could afford plenty. "I forgot." Mila kept her eyes on the white fold of sheet across Amelia's lap. The old *bruja* wore sexy, see-through nightgowns, as if she was a fourteen-year-old *puta*. "I didn't sleep well last night and I guess I'm tired."

"A new lover?" Amelia leered up at her as Mila came around the bed to read the monitor. "I hope you picked a pretty one, this time."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I don't have a lover." Mila bit off the words as she uncapped the sampler. "I need to do your morning bloodwork."

"Touchy, dear?" Amelia chuckled deep in her throat. "You still miss him? The boy who went into the army?"

"He was not a boy, *Señora*." Mila pressed her lips together as she slipped the sampling catheter into the port in Amelia's arm. "It was over long ago."

Sam had thought that the Army would be a door for him. Maybe it was, but it was not one she had wanted to take. They had parted in anger, and there had been no word from him since. What was there to say? The old *bruja* liked to mention Sam, to play her little hurting games. She knew everything. That was her trade—information. They made the big money, the information brokers. She was a *bruja* with the spell to turn rumor into gold. It scared Mila, how much she knew. And it excited her.

The monitor hummed, sipping its microliters of blood, testing for signs of death, so that it could be expensively postponed for another day or week or year. Death came to everyone, but it came to the rich later, and with greater difficulty.

Mila snapped the tubing out of the port and dropped it back into the machine. "What would you like for breakfast, *Señora*?"

"Coffee."

"If you don't eat, Ginger will have to run IVs again tonight."

"So let her. I don't care what she does to my body when I'm asleep."

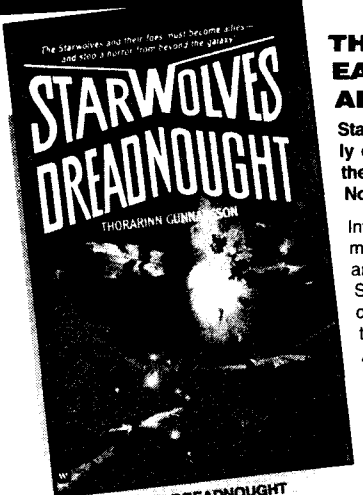
Mila flinched as Amelia's withered hand closed around her wrist. Head averted, she stood very still as Amelia Connor-Vanek began to stroke her face. The old woman's fingers felt like rat feet on her skin, dry and furtive. Mila closed her eyes as the rat-feet fingers wandered lower; touching, caressing, lifting the weight of Mila's breasts with unhurried sensuality. It had made her sick at first, the dry, scaly touch of this woman's hand on her breasts. She bit her lip. Think of how many licensed medical aides are on the agency waiting list. Think of the three years she had waited for this job, for *any* job. It could be worse, somewhere else.

Even if it wasn't, she would stay.

Amelia laughed softly, possessively, as if she had been reading Mila's thoughts. "Such lovely skin—it's your Spanish heritage. You keep me alive, child," she said. "You're honest, or perhaps honestly dishonest is more accurate, since no one can afford to be completely honest in this world of ours." She laughed again, a brittle sound, like breaking glass. "I've come to appreciate the value of honesty, in all its guises. One of these days, I'll give you a bonus, my child. A little gift."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

news from Questar



STARWOLVES: DREADNOUGHT
by Thorarinn Gunnarsson
Cover art by John Harris
0-446-36322-7/$4.99 (In Canada: $5.99)

THE STARWOLVES AND THEIR EARTHLY FOES MUST BECOME ALLIES—OR ALL WILL PERISH!

Starwolves are Earth's outcasts, genetically and bionically enhanced beings whose symbiotic relationship with their spacecrafts have made them formidable warriors. Now the Starwolves return in their fourth sf adventure!

Invisible, undetectable, unstoppable: A terrible alien death machine ravages the galaxy, bent on annihilating humans and Starwolves alike. The only hope for survival is the Starwolves' youngest living battleship—and she will be christened in a deadly hunt for a techno-killer from beyond the stars...

"Written engagingly in a style reminiscent of early Heinlein...captures the reader....Thoroughly enjoyable from start to finish."—*RAVE REVIEWS* ON *STARWOLVES*

ALSO READ:

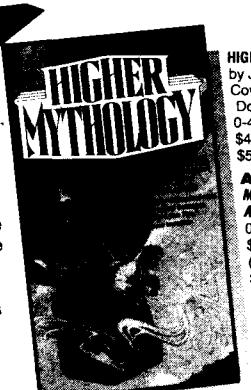
THE STARWOLVES **0-445-21040-0/$3.95 (In Canada: $4.95)**
STARWOLVES: BATTLE OF THE RING **0-445-20908-9/$4.50 (In Canada: $5.99)**
STARWOLVES: TACTICAL ERROR **0-446-36134-8/$4.95 (In Canada: $5.95)**

ALSO THIS MONTH:

Here's the delightful third entry in Jody Lynn Nye's bestselling fantasy series!

The American leprechauns' farm is prospering when suddenly, two of the Wee Folk are unknowingly abducted by hunters! It's up to their human friend Keith Doyle to track down the culprits before the poachers discover their booty—and the secret of the Wee Folks' existence is sold to the tabloids!

"A wonderfully whimsical new fantasy writer emerges in Jody Lynn Nye." — ANNE MCCAFFREY



HIGHER MYTHOLOGY
by Jody Lynn Nye
Cover art by:
Don Maitz
0-446-36335-9
$4.99 (In Canada: $5.99)

ALSO READ:
MYTHOLOGY ABROAD
0-446-36119-4
$4.50
(In Canada: $5.95)

MYTHOLOGY 101
0-445-21021-4
$4.95 (In Canada: $5.95)

AVAILABLE AT BOOKSTORES EVERYWHERE WARNER BOOKS

A Time Warner Company Questar is a registered trademark of Warner Books, Inc. ©1992 Warner Books, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, *Señora*." Mila shivered beneath those fingers—couldn't help herself. The old *bruja* had felt her shudder and was smiling. You don't own me, Mila thought fiercely. This is a trade, *bruja*. Nothing more. Her head had started to hurt again, throbbing with the beat of her pulse. It always got worse when the old *bruja* touched her. Mila lifted her chin, fighting sudden dizziness. "I need to do my log," she said, too brightly. "After, I will take you down to the fountain-court. There are otters in the pool. *Señora* Anderson's aide told me."

"Don't patronize *me*." Amelia pushed Mila's hand roughly away. "I'm not impressed by holographic otters. Real ones might be interesting, but they'd never use real animals. They'd shit in the fountain. I see no reason to parade my decaying flesh in front of all those plastic parodies of youth."

There was a shadow in Amelia's eyes that Mila had never seen before—pain, perhaps? But the bloodwork had been normal. "What does it matter?" Mila asked, with a sweet twinge of malice. "Do you care what they think, downstairs?"

"Cabin fever, child? Has the novelty of all this luxury worn off?" Amelia's withered lips twisted. "I don't need a mirror. I look at your face and I see my reflection. Why should I torture myself with the fountain-court?"

"Oh, you're mistaken, *Señora*! You are a handsome lady. . . ."

"Stop the flustered Mex servant routine." Amelia seized Mila by the arms, pulling her close so that Mila had to look into her pale eyes. "I'm not going to fire you just because you see an old hag when you look at me, and by now you know it. Don't pretend that you don't, or I'll think that you *are* stupid, and I *will* fire you."

The old *bruja*'s nails hurt and her breath was sour in Mila's face. "I am Guatemalan, not Mexican," she said softly. "If you don't like the way people look at your body, why don't you get it *fixed?*"

For a long moment, Amelia stared into her face. Then she laughed, a deep booming laugh that seemed impossible for such a shriveled, wasted woman. As abruptly as she had started, she fell silent. "I am afraid." Her pale eyes pinned Mila. "Now you are the only person in this shitty world who knows that I am afraid of anything." She released Mila and reached for the raw-silk robe beside the bed. "I own you, child, and you hate me for it."

"You do not own me." Mila met Amelia's shadowed eyes. "*No* one owns me."

"You have ambitions, don't you?" Amelia's voice was a dry whisper. "Ambitions as large as my own once were. I respect that. I have decided that I want breakfast after all. Call Antonio's and have them send me smoked turkey and provolone cheese on a sourdough roll. With fresh, dirt-grown asparagus. And then I want you to set up my dreams."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mila opened her mouth to protest, closed it without speaking. "Yes, *Señora*." She looked away from those cold, shadowed eyes. "Right away."

Mila sat beside the monitor, eyes on the bright numbers that tracked Amelia Connor-Vanek's cheating of death. On the clean, white bed, Amelia fell into dreams beneath her VR mask. The breakfast dishes lay piled on a tray beside the bed. That meal—real meat, real cheese, and vegetables grown in irrigated soil instead of a tank—had probably cost more than Mila made in a week. The old *bruja* had barely touched anything. Mila caught a whiff of turkey and her stomach growled. She could eat the leftovers if she wanted, but the thought of eating food that Amelia's fingers had touched made her ill.

She checked the monitor once more, and then got to her feet, too restless to sit still. The blinds were open on the inside wall. In this tower, the rooms ringed a central court that was roofed with a clear composite, so that you could sit under real trees and look up at real sky. All climate-controlled, of course. The recycled air and water were tested hourly. You didn't have to worry about what might be seeping into the river this week, or which factory had "accidentally" released what into the atmosphere yesterday. Far below, the fountain leaped into the air, shimmering with light. The holoed otters would be sliding down a holoed mud-bank, playing and splashing. Were otters extinct? Mila tried to remember.

On the bed, Amelia made a soft noise. A sob. She did that sometimes—cried. Crazy to pay all that money to a VR designer for something that made you *cry*. Amelia's hands twitched, and she sobbed again. It was an innocent sound, somehow. Like a child crying for a lost toy. It sounded strange, coming from those pale, withered lips. Mila checked the monitor. All normal—as normal as it could be. Some drugs were illegal, even for the Amelias of this world. Rev was one of them. But without Rev, VR was just VR, no matter how good a designer you hired. Shoot Rev into your veins, though, and you *lived* it.

Get some, Amelia had told her, when Mila had first started working for her. She had assumed that Mila would have connections. Because she was latina, from the *Barrio*. Mila's lip curled. She had done it—for the same reasons that she stood still beneath Amelia's caressing hands. "Not because you own me," she whispered. The words hung in the cool, clean air.

Mila prowled to the far wall. At her touch, the tissue-thin strips of the blinds contracted into fine threads, letting in a flood of noontime sun. The river was a dirty brown trickle in the bottom of its bed. The green smear was Little Cambodia. Out there, in *los burbios*, your soul was up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for sale. The government owned you for its subsidy dollars, or an employer could claim your flesh as a bonus, because the only alternative was unemployment and the brand of full-subsidy on your personal file. Or the Army owned you. Sam had called it a contract. A way out, for a price. A choice between owners was no choice at all. Only up here, in the towers, could you truly choose.

Mila slapped the blinds closed. The monitor said that Amelia was dreaming, that she was healthy, in spite of the drug in her veins. *La Señora* had set the timer for three hours. This was her chance. Mila sat down at the main terminal in the living room. "Log on," she said. "Password *entrada*."

Harvard Equivalency Curriculum, the terminal intoned softly. *Marketing Theory, 202. Do you wish to continue from your place of exit?*

"Yes." Text blinked onto the screen: assigned reading for the quarter. International Marketing Theory. How to figure out what needed to be sold, how to find the people to make it and the people to sell it to. Mila listened to the soft hum of the apartment's silence and began to read, struggling a little, because her mother had only been able to afford a public high school-equivalency and a decent vocational training program for her daughter. Words and comprehension came slowly at times—but HarvardNet had accepted her, and that was something.

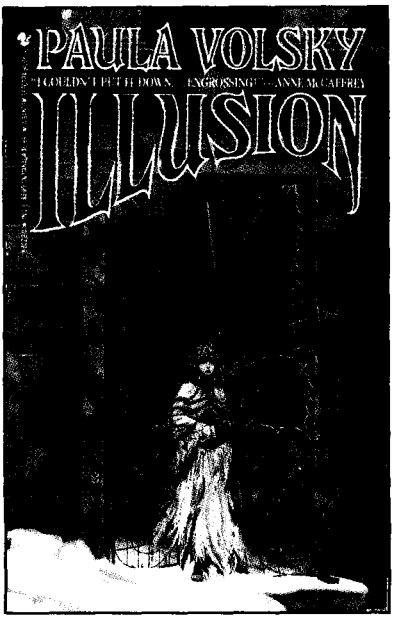
This was why she put up with Amelia's roving hands, why she risked supplying her with her drugs; *this* was the trade. HarvardNet was the best university-equivalency online, and she would never be able to afford it on her salary. A HarvardNet degree was her admission to the city. She could land a job with one of the smaller firms, maybe go freelance someday. This was her *entrada*. This was her escape.

If Amelia didn't find out about it. If she didn't look over her Net expenses and discover the tuition charges. It was a risk. So far, the accounting program hadn't flagged it, and the old *bruja* never bothered to look. God, the woman had *money*.

The global enterprise webs eliminate middle-level managers and push authority for product development and sales down to independent engineers and marketers whose compensation is directly linked to the unit's profits. Brokers at the web's center provide financial and logistical aid, but give the unit discretion over spending, up to a point. Sony-Matohito, for example, is comprised of 287 autonomous companies. Line by line, Mila read, breathless with the sense of future that the words gave her. The headache was back again. She clenched her teeth and fought it.

In the most decentralized webs, brokers identify marketing potential and contract with independent businesses to fill production needs. Thus production moves to the cheapest labor market and does so at the wink of

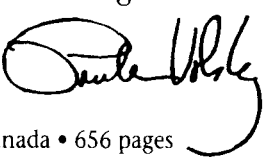
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"A Beautifully Written and Exciting Pure Gold-edged Fantasy."

–The Macon Beacon

"The idea came from my agent. I'd been talking to him years ago about the possibility of doing a fantasy with a French Revolution ambience and he said something about a sentient guillotine. That's what got me on the track of sentient machines: something really nasty at the city gate to prevent escape, something really vicious to do crowd control. It was all very utilitarian once I'd come up with the basic idea. What I've really done is give extremely futuristic technology to an 18th-century culture and labeled it magic."



56022-0 • $5.99/$6.99 in Canada • 656 pages

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the stock market. Nationalism has become nothing more than an emotionally loaded mythology with no real connection to the international nature of commerce.

Adrenaline rushed through Mila's veins as fingers seemed to touch her neck. Blurred memory broke in her head; fright, the dry touch of fingers on her throat and Amelia's soft voice, whispering, whispering . . . then it was gone. A dream? Mila looked over her shoulder, but the room was quiet. Empty. She shivered. Nerves, she told herself, and turned her attention back to the screen.

A beeper went off, shrill enough to make her ears hurt. Mila jerked upright, groggy, vaguely aware that she must have fallen asleep in front of the screen. Her belt alarm! Amelia! She bolted to her feet and ran for the bedroom, adrenaline crashing through her system, the shrill electronic pulse trumpeting *death* throughout the apartment.

Mila had the Justice Center cell to herself. She sat on the narrow bed, staring vaguely at the dull-green wall beyond the expanded-mesh of the cell. Overcrowding wasn't a problem any more. You got the death penalty for so many things. Without appeals, cells emptied fast. You could get the death penalty for negligence if you were a licensed aide. The juries were always city people, and so many city people were old. They could *afford* to be old. Too many of those jurors would have aides of their own at home. They would see themselves in Amelia Connor-Vanek.

But I didn't kill her, Mila told herself one more time. I gave her the usual dose. It was the same stuff, and there was no reason for her to die. The words carried no comfort. It *was* her fault. Rev was illegal, and she had administered it to Amelia. Never mind that the old *bruja* would have fired her if she had refused.

If she had remained sitting beside Amelia's bed, Amelia would not have died. She had died from an overdose of Rev.

Which meant that she had to have done it to *herself*, but there had been no note. The cops on the scene hadn't even bothered to record Mila's hysterical claim of suicide. The bored, court-appointed lawyer had fed her case into LegalNet and had advised her to plead guilty. *Without a suicide note, you're dead, sweetheart. If you didn't do it, you'd better agree to full questioning*, he had told her. *Psychotropes, the whole nine yards. If you help them nail your connection, we can probably cut a deal with the DA.*

Her connection had been *Sam*. He'd gotten the stuff for her through his friend Salgado, because Amelia had offered twice street price, and Sam had needed the money. So she'd told the lawyer to go to hell.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Have it your way, sweetheart, he had said. She hadn't seen him in the two weeks since her arrest.

Mila stared down at her hands, limp in her lap. How many days had she been here, waiting for her trial? Three? Ten? She had lost count. Mesh walls, concrete floor and ceiling, one bed, one toilet/sink combination, a table and a chair. No privacy. If you wanted to piss, the guards got to watch. And they did. Everything was painted the same dull green as the walls, and bolted to the floor.

When she was nine, some of the boys on the street had snared a coyote in the scrubby field beyond the development. They had kept it in an old plastic airline kennel. She remembered how it had crouched in the tiny cage, yellow eyes empty of hope or fear, skinny and crawling with lice. It didn't snarl or bite at the sticks that the boys poked through the bars. It just crouched there. It had finally died.

A guard marched down the corridor. "You, Aguilar. On your feet!"

Mila stood slowly, heart contracting in her chest. Her trial? Would her lawyer even *be* there? Would it matter if he was?

"You got a visitor. Turn around." The guard—a man—opened the cell and cuffed her hands behind her. He also put his hand between her legs.

Mila pressed her lips together, remembering Amelia's rat-feet fingers on her breasts. A visitor? Who was going to visit her *here?* Prison was contagious. Especially when the cops were looking for a drug connection. She stumbled as the guard shoved her forward, down the corridor. The visiting cubicles were just this side of the thick door at the end of the hall. The guard pushed her inside, and the lock clicked. A video screen was set into the green wall. A battered plastic stool stood in front of it. The air smelled like mildew and fear.

"Sam?" Mila's eyes widened as the screen shimmered to life. No. It could not be. "What are *you* doing here?"

"I had some leave. I heard, when I got home." His face was anguished. "Mila, what *happened?*"

How many times had they asked her that question, over and over until her head pounded with the rhythm of the words? "I don't know," she whispered, and struggled with the tears that were trying to come. She hadn't shed a tear, not since they'd taken her from Amelia's apartment. If she started crying now, she'd never stop. She'd cry until there was nothing left of her but a shriveled husk on the floor, until her soul and her mind were empty. "Never mind," she said. "I don't want to talk about it, Sam, do you hear me? There's nothing you can do." Tell me how you are, she wanted to say. Tell me that you're fine, that your choice was a good one for *you*, at least. Please, *querido.*

She didn't say it. She could read the answer in his face, in spite of the grainy video. His hair was army-short, and his face looked skeletal, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

if he'd lost weight. He had new muscles; stringy, lean muscles. He looked harder, older. Changed.

"They sent us to Indonesia," he said. "For the UN—to stop this revolution, I guess. It was so damned easy. We only lost a few people—they might as well have been using sticks against what we had. We didn't even make the US NewsNet."

Mila had to look away. His eyes were the coyote's eyes. If she looked into the mirror, she would see the same eyes in her own face. We were human once, she thought bitterly. At least I think we were.

"*Cariño*? I love you." He stretched out his arms, as if he could reach through the video, through the concrete wall, could put his arms around her and hold her tight.

His face was full of grief. He was afraid for her, and his fear ate at the hard wall that she'd built around herself these past days. She could see her death reflected in his face. In a moment, that wall would crack apart, and the terror would rush in to drown her. "Go away," she whispered. "Don't come here again, Sam. Not ever, do you hear me? I don't want to see you. I don't want to hear from you." She threw herself against the locked door, tugging at the cuffs, wanting to pound on it with her fists. "Turn it off!" she yelled to the invisible eavesdroppers. "I want to go back to my cell."

No one answered, but when she looked over her shoulder, the screen was blank again, a flat gray square of nothing in the green wall. Trembling, she limped back to the stool and sat down. Her shoulder ached where she had slammed it into the door. I love you, *querido*. She held the words inside herself, like a charm, clenched in a fist. I love you. But it was too late. In her mind, she opened the fist, and her palm was empty.

The door opened. Mila waited without turning for the guard to yank her off the stool and hustle her back to her cell.

"Ms. Aguilar?"

A woman's voice, much too polite to be a guard's. Reluctantly, Mila looked. The stranger stood just outside the door, flanked by a guard. She had dark red hair, cut short and stylish, and a strong, bony face. She was dressed in a sleek tunic suit. The suit looked too expensive for a court-appointed lawyer.

"Ms. Aguilar, I'm Rebecca Connor. You've been released into my custody."

She stepped aside, obviously expecting Mila to hop to her feet and trot along at her heels. Mila sat coyote-still, waiting for the stick. "Why am I released?"

The guard started forward to hit her, but the woman put out a hand.

"Ms. Aguilar, I am Amelia Connor-Vanek's daughter. I had my lawyer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

post bail for you." She was tapping her foot impatiently. "Could we discuss this in private, please?"

That made Mila blink. The bail figure had been astronomical. It always was, if you weren't an anglo. Making bail was a pretty dream, like finding a pot of gold under a rainbow, or winning the national lottery. Not applicable to Mila Aguilar *personally*. "Yes," Mila said, with a cold glance at the guard. "I would prefer to discuss this in private."

The guard took her back to her cell and gave her the clothes she had been wearing on the day they arrested her. The day Amelia died. He cuffed her again, and wouldn't take the cuffs off until they reached the front door of the Justice Center. He had given the rest of the things they had taken from her—her uniform bag and its contents—to the woman. As if Mila was a stray dog being claimed by its owner. Mila stalked through the door and out into the sunshine, half-blinded by the harsh, welcome light, resisting the urge to shake herself all over like a dog. Or a coyote.

"My car is over here." The woman put a hand on her elbow.

"You don't have to hold on to me." Mila touched the thin band of the parole collar around her neck. "It would be foolish to run away."

"I'm sorry." The woman took her hand away abruptly. "Were they all as bad as that jerk?"

Mostly they had been worse. Mila shrugged, and watched the woman's lips tighten. She didn't like having her friendly overture rejected. You *want* something from me, Mila thought. You paid a lot for it, and I don't know what it is, yet. I do not think you are my friend. She climbed into the woman's car. It was a private vehicle, licensed for alcofuel. She revised the cost of the woman's suit upward. The old *bruja* had never spoken of a daughter. Not once. I should worry, Mila thought. I should be afraid. She merely felt numb. She kept seeing Sam's face in her mind, the new hard line of his jaw and the coyote-shadows in his eyes.

The woman drove silently, threading the manicured park blocks that surrounded the big residential towers and their retail clusters. She was going to Amelia's tower. Mila recognized the neighborhood. The woman parked in the sub-surface garage. Security's invisible eyes stared down from ceiling and walls. Mila felt the first stir of apprehension as the lift carried them upward. Some kind of trap? The lift door opened to Amelia's private anteroom. "Why did you pay my bail?" Mila asked.

"I need your help." The woman stepped out.

Sure. Mila followed her reluctantly through the anteroom and into the carpeted living room. In prison, her pre-arrest past had become brittle and unreal, fragile as old-fashioned movie film that could crumble at a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

touch. The familiar scent of Amelia's rooms brought it back to her in a staggering rush: Sam and the *Barrio* and Amelia's dead, gray face.

"You look as if you're going to faint." The woman started to reach for her, caught herself, and pushed a silk-upholstered chair toward her. "I think you'd better sit down."

"I'm fine, *Señora* Connor." Mila held on tightly to the chair back. "I told the police everything I know. There's nothing else to tell. I can't help you." Mila had escaped the kennel, now. She could be afraid again. "Who are you, and what is it that you want?"

"I told you who I am. I want a file." Rebecca Connor paced across the enormous carpeted space that Amelia had rarely used. "My mother bought and sold . . . information. I suspect you know that." She paused by the transparent inner wall, staring down into the upper branches of the fountain-court trees. "She had retired, but she would have kept some special information. As . . . insurance. I can't find it."

"I didn't steal it."

"I didn't say you did. Do I see otters down there?" Connor's shoulders moved, as if she had sighed. "What I *did* find was obsolete. Useless. And it was easy to find. That makes me think that there is more, harder to find, and that it *isn't* obsolete. I'm hoping that you can find it for me."

"Why me?" Mila lifted her chin. "I'm just an aide, *Sēnora.* A dumb latina from the *Barrio.* What would I know about a file? *La Señora* didn't tell me anything."

Connor turned away from the wall at last. Her eyes were cold. "*Are* you a dumb latina? My mother is . . . *was* . . . very creative at hiding things in plain sight. What I want is your intuition. I want you to find her hiding place. The information has to be in hard-data form. It's not in her Netspace." Connor laughed coldly. "I'm better at that than she ever was, and she knew it!"

"I can't help you." Mila crossed her arms, aware of the thin parole collar, heavy as a stone around her neck.

"You're going to *try.*" Rebecca's eyes were a brilliant, augmented green, cold as sea ice. "I bought you for the price of your bail and the leverage it took to get you off the DA's weekly conviction list. My mother kept a record of your course hours, you know. We could add theft to your negligence charge." She smiled thinly. "We'll make a trade. You cooperate, and I'll edit Amelia's financial records to hide your theft. If you find the file for me, I'll lean on the DA to drop the negligence charge."

So the old *bruja* had known about the courses all along! *Honestly dishonest,* she had called Mila, with her hands on Mila's breasts. It *had* truly been a trade, the hands for the credit hours. "I *have* to help you." Mila didn't try to keep the bitterness out of her voice. "I have no choice, do I?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You have a choice," Connor said gently. "You know, you did quite well in your course work, for someone with a public education from the Net."

Mila turned away, hating this woman, hating her more than she had ever hated anyone in her life. Because she had all the power, and Mila had none—and had never really had any. Her *entrada* had been an illusion only, and this woman had flung it in her face. "Tell me what you want me to do," she said.

This woman's method of looking for something was a strange one, Mila decided. She wanted Mila to touch, taste, smell, examine, and listen to every single item in the entire apartment. They started in the bedroom, because that was where Amelia had spent most of her time. By evening, Mila decided that she would grow old before they finished.

"Nothing happens." She scowled at the holo-cube she was holding. "What do you expect? Trumpets? A sign from God?"

"You're not done with that yet. Taste it. Lick it. Just *do* it." Sitting crosslegged on the floor, Connor ran a hand through her rumpled hair. "*Something* will happen. I don't know what."

"I told you. . . ."

" . . . *La Señora* never told me anything," Connor finished for her. "I think she was playing a game with you and me. She knew that I'd come looking. I think you're the key."

"Why should you come looking? Why not just give it to you?" Mila touched the tip of her tongue to the black base of the holo cube, and made a face. A man smiled at her from the center of the cube. He had a long face and warm green eyes. His hair hung down in a dozen red-gold braids. "And why should I have some kind of key?" she asked.

"Amelia knew I'd come looking because she taught me this business, and I knew her . . . methods. She didn't give anything away to *anyone*, honey, and certainly not to *me*. We are—were—competitors." Connor took the cube from Mila's hand. "It would be her little joke, to make you the key. She knew how I felt about her Mex girls."

"I am Guatemalan."

Connor shrugged and put the cube back on its shelf, straightening it carefully.

"Who is that?" Mila asked.

"He was Aaron Connor. My father—the only man she ever bothered to marry. I don't know why she did that. Maybe because he actually loved her. The more fool, he." She picked up a lap-top reader. "Try this," she said coldly.

Was. So he was dead? Such bitterness in this woman! Mila took the reader. It was an old one—not the slick holo model that Amelia had used,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when she bothered to use a reader at all. Mila nearly dropped it as the screen brightened. YOU'RE GETTING WARMER, MILA. The words glowed briefly and vanished.

Connor hissed softly through her teeth and snatched the reader from Mila's hands. "See this?" She pried a tiny silver disk from the reader's edge. "It was matched to *your* skin chemistry! It would only activate the message if *you* picked it up. I *knew* she was playing games." She threw the reader across the room.

Mila flinched as it hit the wall and cracked. "So she *did* this." Like a child's game—warmer, colder, you're getting hot. Hope and anger woke as twin flames in her heart. She had thought that the old *bruja* might have left a suicide message in her Netspace, that some latino-hating cop had erased it. "She hid it," Mila whispered. "The note."

"What note?"

"The *suicide* note." Mila bent to pick up the broken reader. "She *hid* it. For me to find." A game, and the stakes were Mila's life. A *bruja* for real.

"Forget it, dear." Connor's voice was cold. "Amelia Connor-Vanek didn't suicide. Your connection sold you some bad drugs, and you didn't watch the monitor long enough to catch it. Who are you trying to protect, anyway?" Connor picked up a musicube and held it up to the light. "Negligence is no big feather for a DA's cap. I checked on your case. They'd pull your license and let you walk, for your connection." She tossed the cube to Mila.

Not that trade. Not now, not ever. "I don't remember who it was." Mila cupped her palms around the cube, touched it with her tongue, held it to her ear.

"It was your boyfriend, wasn't it? Yes, he's in my mother's file on you." Connor shrugged. "Poor judgment, honey. No full-sub army bait is worth your life—no matter *how* good he is in bed."

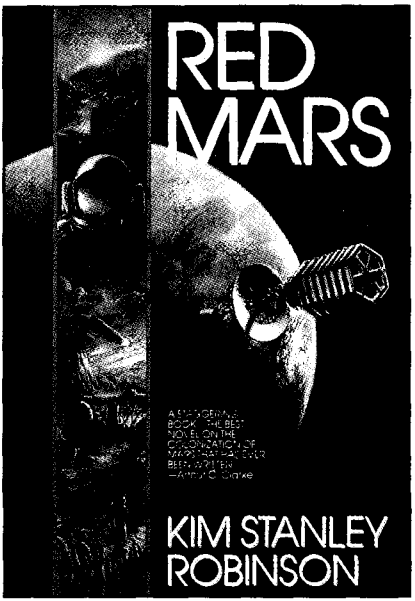
"He was an artist." *Was*. She had put it in the past tense, as if he was dead—as if that part of him was dead.

"An artist?" The woman's lip curled. "I suppose you can call yourself anything you want, on a full subsidy."

"Do you think it is a pleasant life?" Mila hissed. "Living in the suburbs with enough to eat and drink—almost—and nothing ahead of you but another empty day? It was not his choice, *Señora* Connor. His mother was a hooker, okay? Her implant failed and there he was." She touched the red-and-blue licensed-aide patch on her shoulder. "I could get *this*, only because my mother was never on full subsidy. Sam grew up on full subsidy. For him, there was only the army."

This was what he had told *her*, so angry on that last day. And she had argued with him, yelled at him, wept. Mila laid her clenched fists gently

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



THE EPIC NOVEL OF MARTIAN COLONIZATION– A SCIENCE FICTION CLASSIC IN THE MAKING!

540 pages
$22.95 ($27.95 in Canada) hardcover
$11.95 ($14.95 in Canada) trade paperback

"A lyrical, beautiful, accurate legend of the future by one of the best writers of our time."
–David Brin

"A staggering book... The best novel on the colonization of Mars that has ever been written."
–Arthur C. Clarke

"The best pure science fiction novel I have read in years, a book so full of credible human drama, technological savvy, breathtaking planetary scope, stunning historical sweep, and hardnosed spiritual uplift that I regard it as the prologue of a brand-new Martian Chronicles."
–Michael Bishop, Science Fiction Age

The first 50 who respond to this ad will receive a special signed hardcover edition of *Red Mars* free. Send name and address to Bantam Books, Dept RM1, 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10103

SPECTRA

BANTAM
NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on her thighs. "He saw what was all around him on the streets," she said. "He saw rage, fear, despair, and hope. He saw the things that we have stopped seeing because they are always there and it hurts too much. He took that hurt, and he painted it on the walls and the overpasses and the rail. He gave it life, all that hurt, but no one gave *him* a choice. Do you understand?"

"Are you telling me that you love him?" Connor's face was still, without emotion. "Love is a luxury of your class, Mila—a pretty myth, like winning the lottery. In my game, you know better. Love is nothing more than a type of loyalty, and loyalty is something that you sell for a very good price. My mother would have told you *that*. She never let loyalty get in her way—not to a lover, not to her daughter."

"Sam is not part of this, and he was not my connection." Mila threw the minicube back into its bin. "It was suicide."

"It was *not* suicide!" Connor stood up, glaring down at Mila, fists clenched at her sides as if she wanted to hit her. "Tell me about your mother. Did she want you to have a better life than she had? That's a part of your suburban culture too, isn't it? The kids have a chance at the future that didn't quite work out for Mom and Dad? Did you make your mother proud of you when you got your license? Or wasn't it enough for her? Is that why you stole course time from Amelia?"

"My mother died when I was twelve." Mila picked up the next cube. "She got cancer." The grief was so old that she barely felt it anymore. Her mother had worked nights at the Bon, playing dress-up with the wealthy. She had slept during the day, while Mila did her lessons on the Net. Maybe it had been the leukemia that had made her sleep so much. Or maybe, when you finally realized that your life wasn't going to go anywhere else, that you had everything you were ever going to get, there was nothing else to do but sleep. Mila wanted to touch her forehead, to probe for the echo of the so-frequent headache. With an effort, she kept her hand still. "At forty-two, at her skill level, she didn't qualify for viral therapy under fed-med."

"I'm sorry."

"No, you're not. Why should you be?" Mila tossed the last of the musicubes back into the bin.

"Yes, you're Amelia's type. You'd react to her little cruelties, and she'd like that. But she'd break you, in the end." Connor got to her feet and yanked her tunic straight. "She taught me the business, but not enough to be better than her. Oh, no. *She* was the queen. The one who could sell you anything, for the right price. Who was going where with what product line, and why. The Cartel's top-secret plans for a better mousetrap. Who was in bed with whom and when. And how they did it, if you really wanted to know. That's the coin of the realm, these days. Information.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And I'm better than she ever was." Connor stared down at Mila. "Much better, do you understand? She'll never forgive me for that."

"She's *dead*," Mila said softly. "It's late. Can I go home please?" Home. An empty word for four walls and an empty bed.

"No." Connor looked around the room as if she expected something to leap at her out of the shadows. "You stay here until we're finished."

Mila shrugged. A cell was a cell. At least this one didn't smell as bad as the one at the Justice Center.

Mila woke to darkness and silence, her head aching, her hands clutching reflexively at the blanket tangled around her waist as she tried to remember where she was. Amelia's apartment. Memory returned, borne on the feel of the cushions beneath her shoulders. She was asleep on the floor, on the silk-covered cushions that no one ever used. Mila sat up, pushing her hair back from her sweaty face. A sibilant whisper of breathing was *Señora* Connor, asleep on the sofa. Neither of them had wanted to sleep in Amelia's bed.

The darkness pressed in around her, thick and heavy, as if the air-conditioning had failed. She could feel the blood pounding in her brain, as if her skull might burst at any second. Unwinding the blanket from her legs, Mila got silently to her feet. She had never been here in the dark. Faint light seeped in through the fountain-court wall. It stretched the room into vast, unexplored dimensions. Mila longed suddenly for her small, neat bedroom. It was crowded, the crummy tract house where she lived. But in the darkness, it was always familiar. Angelina's baby would cry and wake Roberto up. Guillermo would get home from his shift at the clinic, making the pipes bang as he ran water in the kitchen. He would leave it on too long, and Angelina would come out to scold him for using up their water ration. They were landmarks, those baby-cries and hissing whispers. Landmarks of safety.

Safety was a chain. It could tether you to the *Barrio* forever. Here, it could bind her to this red-haired woman. You had to take risks, or be the coyote trapped in its kennel. Mila took a deep breath and tiptoed into Amelia's bedroom. In the doorway, she hesitated. The bed was in shadows, and for a terrible moment, she thought that Amelia was there, that she would reach out and seize Mila's arm with her rat-feet fingers. But it was empty, the bed; sheeted and white. Mila sat down on the edge and reached for the VR mask on the table. There *was* a suicide note. Mila was sure of it, never mind what *Señora* Connor said. It was here, for her to find. And somewhere, the old *bruja* was laughing at her.

The mask covered her face like thick, pliable skin, made her breathless with claustrophobia, even though it stopped at her lips. *Amelia* had worn this. It had soaked up the feel of her ancient skin. Mila shuddered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

violently as she smoothed it down around her neck. The lenses in the mask made the room look distorted and strange, like looking through the bottom of a glass. In a reality parlor, you paid to put on skinthins that covered your whole body, jumped up and down in some little room, while you pretended to be Spiderman or a ninja or to fly. For all her money and custom-designed VR fantasies, the old *bruja* had only bothered with a mask. No gloves, even.

Mila hesitated. I am afraid, she thought. I am afraid that she is here, waiting for me in the darkness, waiting to swallow me up. A small noise from the other room made her jump. *Señora* Connor, who held all the cards, and would take whatever Mila found. Mila held her breath, heard nothing but a hum of silence. "Log on," Mila said. Her voice sounded high and breathy, and nothing happened. Coded for Amelia's voice only? Relieved in spite of herself, Mila reached for the mask. Then she caught her breath as the lenses in the mask blurred with sudden light and color.

The Net must have recognized the VR connect and started to run a file automatically. Mila clutched the edge of the bed as the light brightened. A beach. She was on a beach of black sand, with an endless blue horizon in front of her. Waves curled and broke into white foam with a low roar, and seagulls shrieked overhead. Mila caught her breath. It looked so *real*, but she could still feel the sheets beneath her palms. When she looked down, though, she had no body; there was nothing but black sand beneath her, and a tuft of tough-looking grass that whipped in a wind she didn't feel—as if she was a ghost, or invisible.

Very strange.

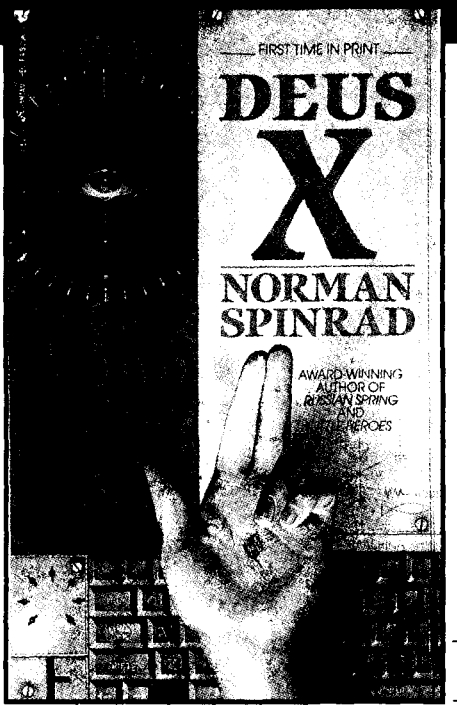
A man and a child were running through the surf, laughing. His damp hair trailed over his shoulders in red-gold tangles. The girl's hair was even redder than his. She squealed with laughter as the man caught her and tossed her into the air. A woman had joined them. She was young too, like the man. Mila's age. They held hands, like one of those slick ads for vacation packages that you couldn't really afford, but paid for anyway, because it looked so damn good in VR.

They were walking across the black sand now, walking toward Mila, smiling at each other. The man and the woman were looking at each other over the little girl's head. Sam had looked at her like that. Before the anger and the army. Mila swallowed, her throat tight. They walked past her. An invisible observer, Mila watched them climb the low dune beyond the beach. They were picking up clothes and a cooler that would be full of food, laughing and talking to each other about little things—about how the girl needed a nap and maybe they would take a nap, too, only you could tell that it wasn't sleep they were thinking about from the look in their eyes and the way they touched each other.

Mila raised a hand to her mouth, felt the soft thickness of the mask

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GOD ISN'T DEAD UNTIL YOU PULL THE PLUG.



192 pages
$3.99 ($4.99C)

The earth is finished, ozone fried, greenhouse choked, a dying world. Humanity is barely hanging on, struggling against rising oceans, polluted air, its callous abuse of the planet. Our last hope is the Big Board: a vast electronic net containing media, education, finance–and new, controversial duplicates of its human users. They're called successor entities, renegade pixel energies, struggling for self-identity. And now, during earth's final hour, the Roman Catholic Church confronts its ultimate challenge....

BANTAM SPECTRA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beneath her fingers. She recognized him now—the man in the holo cube. Rebecca's father, the one man Amelia had married. So the red-haired child was Rebecca Connor? Mila looked again at the woman, at the line of cheek and jaw beneath the smooth young flesh. "Amelia," she whispered. As the trio disappeared over the crest of the dune, a gusty, unfelt wind whipped up a plume of sand. The sand twisted into a whirling column. Mila recoiled as it solidified and took on human shape.

"I've been waiting for you." Amelia leered at her, shriveled and pale in a blue bikini. "You *are* ambitious, child. I knew that you would come looking for your bonus. You're not one to wait politely to be handed a bone, are you?" Her grin widened. "Well, it's yours. Almost. Just tell me my name."

"Amelia," Mila said. She was moving. Mila looked down and discovered that she had a body now. It looked just like her own body, the brown skin marred by the birthmark on her hip. Sam would kiss that small spot when they made love—would bite it gently. She was walking toward Amelia. In a rush of panic, Mila tried to stop, but she was only wearing a mask, and she had no control over her VR body. "Amelia!" she cried. "Your name is Amelia Connor-Vanek!"

Still grinning, Amelia reached for her.

"Exit!" Mila tore the mask from her face, blinking in the sudden darkness.

"What's going on? Light!" Connor stood in the doorway, eyes puffy with sleep. "I heard you yell," she said, as the room lights brightened. "What were you doing?" Her eyes narrowed as she noticed the VR mask clutched in Mila's hand.

"I thought that the file might be here." Mila dropped the mask back onto the bedside table. "I don't like VR. It scares me."

"I told you that the file isn't in her Netspace." Connor's tone was cold. "I checked. My mother never liked the Net." Her lip curled. "But she needed a good Net operator, so she made me into one. To serve her needs. I didn't hire you to check her VR files."

"You didn't hire me at all!" Mila stood up. "You *bought* me, remember?" The file *was* in the virtual. The old *bruja* had said so. She must have fixed it, like she had fixed the reader—so that only Mila could summon her shriveled ghost. Mila shivered. "That was *you*," she said. "On the beach."

"You figured that out, did you?" Connor turned to stare down into the fountain-court. "It was a vacation, on some island she rented," she said softly. "I'd forgotten about it." She laughed. "Lovers are a liability in this business. If they care about you, they make you too vulnerable. So you buy yourself ones who *don't* care, and if they're stupid enough to fall in love with you, you dump them. Your father died before you were born,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but your DNA record makes you his. Is that why your mother named you Milagro? It means *miracle* in Spanish, doesn't it?"

"He had a heart attack. He smoked when he was younger, and it was on his medical record. So the ambulance wouldn't take him to the hospital. My mother didn't know she was pregnant when he died. She had to pay for the DNA match to prove I was his, or they would have cut our subsidy. Don't tell me that you're sorry, anglo."

"No federal funds for illegitimate pregnancies. No federally funded treatment for self-induced illness." Connor turned slowly to face her. "Amelia divorced Aaron about a month after that vacation. She kept *me*, because she could turn me into something useful. Oh, she was generous! She gave him a lot of money. He used it to kill himself. Jet-skiing. Hang-gliding off Everest. High-altitude sky diving. It took him a couple of years, but he finally did it. She didn't care. He didn't matter to her, and I only mattered because I was *useful*. What do you want from life, Milagro Aguilar? Tell me."

The soft light cast shadows beneath her cheeks, made her look old in spite of her smooth skin and bright hair. It had to have been a long time ago, that beach. If Connor ever gave up the cosmetic work and the fetal-cell implants, she'd look just like Amelia.

"I don't want to be a coyote," Mila said softly. "I paid for the courses I took. I paid for them in full. I am going home now, because I don't want to sleep in this place. I will come back tomorrow to help you look for your treasure."

"That's the only VR file she had." Connor looked past Mila, as if she had forgotten that she was there. "What a crazy thing to keep."

Mila walked past her and out to the lift, heart beating fast enough to make her breathless. She knew where the file was, never mind what *Señora* Connor said about the VR. The treasure would be information. It would be valuable, and it would be hers. All she needed was the old *bruja's* name. A riddle. More of her little games. The lift doors whispered open. Mila thought that *Señora* Connor might try to stop her, but the apartment was silent. As if it were empty.

It wasn't empty. It was full of ghosts. Mila shivered and stepped quickly into the lift.

She went to Salgado.

He didn't live in the *Barrio*, but out on the fringe of the suburbs in a large house that must have belonged to someone very rich, once. He was what Amelia had been, but on a smaller scale, a local *brujo*. In the old times, he would have sold charms against the evil eye, love potions, and cures for warts. Now he sold fake kids for the subsidy role, news of a job that was going to open up, and the name of the person to bribe for the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

interview. Salgado was small, but he would know the right connections. She needed Salgado. It didn't matter that it was the middle of the night. Salgado worked at night.

His guards let her in, young punks with braided hair who undressed her with their eyes—and would do it with their hands if Salgado threw her out. Head high, Mila shouldered past them. The house took her breath away. Outside, it was shabby, a sagging ruin in a landscape of dead shrubbery. Inside, walls and ceiling glowed with real wood. Soft yellow light made the grain shine like satin. White carpet covered the floor, and tall porcelain vases held fresh-cut flowers.

"I am very impressed, *Señorita.*" Salgado bowed her formally onto a coral-colored sofa, dark eyes glittering with laughter. "You are out of jail. That is quite an achievement."

"I am." Mila smiled back coldly, unwilling to be charmed. He was like *Señora* Connor—sexy on the surface, but old underneath. Old. "I have come to talk to you about a deal."

"What kind of deal?" His calculating eyes pinned her, shrewd and without warmth above his smile. "Your employer is dead. What do you have to offer me? Beyond your body, that is?"

Mila ignored his leer. "I am employed by her daughter. She believes that there is a file of very valuable information to be found. She has hired me to find it." Mila allowed herself a faint smile. "I have found it, and she has not."

Salgado steepled his fingers and stared at the ceiling.

A waiting game. He knew who she worked for. It was his business to know. He wanted her to tell him, and then he would score points. Points mattered. Mila waited.

Salgado sighed at last, a concessionary sigh. "It is possible that information from that quarter might have value. If it is any good, I will give you something for it."

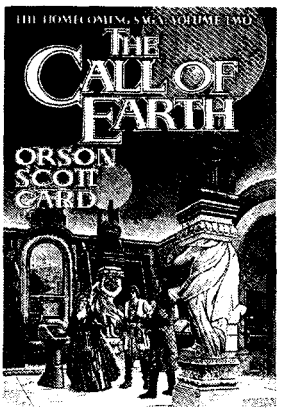
"If it is as good as I believe, I will want a lot," Mila said softly. They stared at each other silently for a long moment. "I will need to download it from a VR without anyone knowing."

Salgado smiled, but this time his smile was thoughtful, and he played gently with his perfect black hair. "I'll give you what you need," he said. "Come back to me if you get something, and we will discuss it."

All she needed was the name, the answer to the riddle. Her *entrada*. It was almost dawn. In the gray light, the neighborhood looked pale and colorless, as if all life had drained away during the evening. The dead trees and rusting cars had always been there, but in this cold light, they gave the streets the look of a ghost town, as if everyone had died overnight. This street was mostly Bangladeshi, the last refugees admitted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Some science fiction series are simply accretions of novels tied together...but Mr. Card's Ender books form one philosophical rumination on the question of whether taking life can ever be morally justified. [The Homecoming saga] poses the same question in the context of a planetary civilization."
—The New York Times Book Review



0-312-93037-2 • $21.95

THE CALL OF EARTH

ORSON SCOTT CARD

VOLUME TWO IN THE HOMECOMING SAGA

"Card gives us an interaction between supreme intelligence and human mental capacity that is at once an intellectual exercise, a biblical parable and a thoroughly enjoyable piece of storytelling."
—The Chicago Tribune

And in mass market paperback—the first volume of Homecoming by the author of the multi-award-winning ENDER'S GAME and SPEAKER FOR THE DEAD, and the nationally bestselling XENOCIDE.

THE MEMORY OF EARTH

"[In the Homecoming saga] Card has succeeded once again in making absorbing ideas and situations that could have led other authors to disaster."
—Chicago Sun-Times

"*THE MEMORY OF EARTH* succeeds...[Card] left me anticipating the next volume."
—The Philadelphia Inquirer

0-812-53259-7 • $5.99/$6.99

Now Available from TOR BOOKS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

before the borders closed to everyone except rich anglos. The flea market on the corner was as drab and lifeless as the rest of the street, all color gone from the woven rag mats that divided the empty lot into stalls.

A bent, sexless figure was sweeping dust with a frayed broom. A bundle of cloth beside the cracked sidewalk was a woman. Dead, or just sleeping? Mila hesitated, saw the gentle rise of the woman's chest. Sleeping, with her arm tucked around a knotted-string bag of onions. Waiting for the market to open.

Almost to the *Barrio*, almost home. Think of a name, think of the answer, the ticket inside, the *entrada*. Her headache was back, worse than ever. Mila sat down on the front steps of a tall house with arched windows and a circular driveway. The windows had been broken and mended with plastic. Black strands of electrified wire fenced in rows of carrots in the front yard. The adrenaline-rush of her find had faded, and fatigue made the muscles in her legs quiver.

Why did the old *bruja* do Rev and watch herself run on a long-ago beach? Mila blinked, eyes full of sand, too tired, almost, to think. The old woman had spent hours dreaming. Every day. Mila had always assumed that she had a library of custom-designed diversions to play in.

But the beach had been the *only* VR. So her daughter had said. Crazy *bruja*. Crazy *vieja*. Movement caught Mila's eye—a shadow creeping along the house wall behind her. Danger? Awake in an instant, skin tingling with adrenaline, Mila stood. It wasn't stalking *her*. Mila almost slipped away—always the safe thing to do—but a thin hissing halted her. She knew the sound. An airbrush. She'd heard it too many times not to know it. Cautiously, Mila tiptoed closer to the house. No sign of life behind the sheeted windows. She edged around the corner, screened by the leafless skeletons of dead shrubbery.

It was a kid, thirteen maybe. He crouched in front of a bare stretch of wall, working on a picture. The hissing brush shaded in a human figure with sweeps of brown and gold.

Goosebumps rose on Mila's arms. He reminded her of Sam—the same hunched concentration, the same braid hanging forward over his shoulder. She must have made a sound, because the kid looked up, eyes wide and darkly startled. "Wait," Mila said, but he was already running, back bent, scurrying across the dusty yard. He vaulted one-handed over a battered chain-link fence at the rear of the property, and vanished.

He didn't look at all like Sam. The picture would be good, though, when he finished it. Mila touched a painted straggle of black hair, stared at the smear of wet color on her fingertip. I do not think of Sam anymore, she thought, and felt a quick pain in her chest. A deal with Salgado—a *deal*, and not just a sale—would include her in his bed. They both knew

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it. There would be no place for Sam in her life anymore then, even if he wanted to be there, even if the Army didn't own him.

Love is a type of loyalty, Señora Connor had said. *And loyalty is something that you sell for a very good price.* It was the truth, Mila thought bitterly. She was already thinking of how to use Salgado, how to learn the way into that invisible labyrinth that hid wealth and power at its center. Someone tweaked the striped sheet that curtained the house's front window, and Mila hurried on down the street.

A lover who cared about you was a liability. The *bruja's* daughter had said that too, in her bright, bitter voice. She had been right, and suddenly Mila knew why the old *bruja* watched her young self run down the beach over and over again with the man whose name she had kept, and their child.

Because she *had* loved him once, no matter what *Señora* Connor said. Because that time had been *hers*, not an item to be sold or traded, but a random moment that had no value to anyone except Amelia Connor-Vanek. Mila shook her head. The old *bruja* could have had her VR designer make that family see her, welcome her, forgive her—whatever she wanted. Rev would have made it *real*. But she had chosen to remain a ghost. An outsider forever, unseen and untouchable. To punish herself? To remind herself of what she had traded away? Or to remind herself of what she must be? *"Siempre sola,"* Mila whispered. "Alone."

I had faith in you, child.

Mila froze in the middle of the buckled sidewalk, her skin going hot and cold in waves. The old *bruja's* voice. Inside her head! The street faded to a blur, overlaid by an image of the terminal screen in front of her, of meaningless words frozen still. Now, she remembered her terror as Amelia touched her. *Caught!* Then the rat-feet fingers had stroked her throat, and she had felt the soft roughness of a drug patch being pressed into her skin, before fear and surprise faded away to a dream of voices whispering, whispering in her ears. . . .

"What have you done to me?" Mila gasped, struggling with terror.

There are some very specialized hypnotropes available on the drug market. Back in my early years, when I still operated in the flesh, I became quite skilled at implanting and blocking information. You can bury all kinds of things in the human brain—there is a lot of useful storage space there. When I am finished, you won't remember a thing, child. Until it's time.

Rebecca Connor had been right. Mila smothered hysterical laughter. The file wasn't in the VR. It had been in Mila's head all this time!

I told you I admired your honest dishonesty. I had a daughter once. Perhaps you find that hard to believe, but I did. I taught her everything that I knew, and I taught her too well. When she had learned everything

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I could give her, she walked away from me. She disdained me. I had entertained a dream that we would work together, that we would be the best. A youthful dream. In this business, you work best alone.

She is better than me.

It's funny. I thought about calling her the other day—just to speak to her again. It's too late for that. Never have children, Milagro Aguilar. You cannot afford to look behind you in this business, and children tether you to the past. They tempt you to look over your shoulder, to remember who you were and compare that person to yourself. Never look back. Keep your eyes on tomorrow, or you will turn into a pillar of salt. You will slow down and the competition will take the world away from you. Remember that, child. So here is your bonus. Your gift. You will figure out how to use it. You know where you want to go, and you are willing to pay what it costs to get there. I predict that you will go far. Nothing is certain in this world, but I have made you my heir. Because you are like me.

And now, I'm going to lie down. I have quit this game and there is salt in my veins. I don't plan to spend the rest of my life hiding from boredom, and I am tired of bribing Death. By the time you wake up, it will be too late for you to intervene.

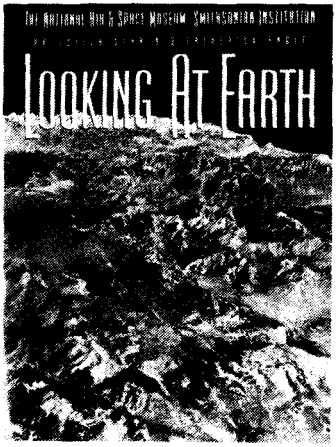
Mila staggered as the street solidified around her, bright with morning sun. The old *bruja* had killed herself, and left her suicide note in Mila's brain! Mila moaned with the pain in her head. A man shuffled past her, brownskinned, with a wispy black beard, dressed all in white. He watched her nervously from the corners of his eyes, crowding the curb. Mila stared at him blankly.

Names, numbers, words without meaning filled her brain. They pressed against the walls of her skull until she thought her head would burst. She had to record them, right now. She had to release them.

She ran all the way back to the house, burst through the door and past a startled Angelina. Not on a terminal, not when Salgado knew about the file—she was still thinking clearly enough to know better than *that*. Guillermo had paper, because he wrote poetry after his shift some nights and he said that the Net killed poetry. Mila hammered on his door until he woke. Angelina was babbling questions at her, clutching at her arm, but the words had no meaning, were lost in the jumble of syllables/numbers/names that filled her pounding head. Mila shook her off, snatched the dog-eared pad from the surprised and bleary Guillermo, and fled to her room, slamming the door in Angelina's face.

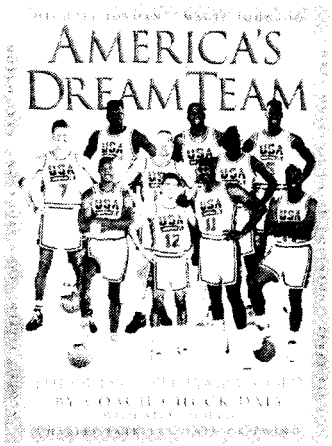
She wrote all morning. Sitting crosslegged on the bed, hunched over the pad, she filled page after page with her clumsy script. The words, dates, numbers came to her one after another, without meaning, without control. As she wrote each one down, it vanished from her mind, popping like a soap bubble. She, Mila, watched from a small corner of her mind

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LOOKING AT EARTH is an unprecedented portrait of our planet as seen from the heavens. See the earth in images captured by spacecraft that reveal sights hidden from earth-bound eyes. Spectacular wonders such as The Grand Canyon, Mount Fugi, the Andes, and Africa's Great Rift emerge in sweeping panoramas in this beautiful, hardbound book. *Looking At Earth's* 304 pages are packed with 290 exciting, full-color photographs, satellite images, photo mosaics and high resolution topographical images.

AMERICA'S DREAM TEAM: The Quest For Olympic Gold is the only book of its kind to chronicle the USA Olympic Basketball Team. Written by coach Chuck Daly, published in conjunction with the NBA, this book includes the team's history, statistics, strategy, player biographies, behind the scenes information-the whole story from training camp to Barcelona. Follow the Dream Team on their road to Olympic glory with 275 full-color photos and illustrations in this beautiful hardboud edition.



Please send me: ____ copies of **LOOKING AT EARTH @ $39.95** each
____ copies of **AMERICA'S DREAM TEAM @ $24.95** each

Please add $1.50 per book for shipping & handling. NYS residents add 8.25% sales tax.

Please make check or money order payable to **Turner Publishing, Inc.**

Send to: **Turner Publishing, Inc., 420 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10018**

Name _____

Address _____ Phone _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as her fingers scurried across the page. She had no control over them. She was merely a vehicle for the old *bruja's* ghost, the skin of her hands a glove for those rat-feet fingers. How many times had the old *bruja* crept up behind her as she studied, with her drugs and her whispers?

Sometime in the afternoon, the words ran out. Mila dropped the pen onto the bed and straightened her fingers. An angry red groove marked the side of her finger where she had clutched the pen, and she smothered a cry as her hand cramped viciously. Her body ached, as if it had taken the effort of every muscle to get those words down onto the paper. One by one, she picked up the sheets, numbering them carefully. She recognized some of the names. They were on the NewsNet; politicians, and corporate names that *everyone* knew. Vilchek-Wasabe. EuroSynco. Sony-Matohito. The connections would be in the dates and account codes. In time, she would understand them. Mila folded the pages neatly. This was a ball of platinum string that she and Salgado could unravel for a long time. Each new thread would lead to others, would lead her deeper into the labyrinth of the old *bruja's* world. This was, indeed, a treasure. This was her *entrada.*

She sat on the bed in the afternoon heat, pages in her hand, remembering black sand and a young woman laughing. In her mind, she heard the echo of Amelia's whispering. It made her feel unclean, as if those rat-fingers had groped across her soul. *You are like me,* the old *bruja* had said. Mila shuddered, folded the sheets of paper, and shoved them into her pocket.

Rebecca was asleep on the sofa when Mila let herself into the apartment. Her eyelids fluttered and she made a small sound in her sleep, like a sob. Like Amelia, dreaming of her lost beach. For a moment, Mila stood silent, looking down at her, then she bent and touched her shoulder lightly. Rebecca's eyes flew open and she stood up in one swift motion.

"You came back." She thrust her fingers through her hair. "I didn't expect you to come back. You had the file when you left, didn't you?"

Mila nodded.

"I am not as good as my mother," Rebecca said with quiet bitterness. She looked out at the treetops beyond the interior wall. "She despised me for that—for being less than she was. That's why I finally split."

"She said you were better than she was."

"Ha." Rebecca's lip twitched. "So, what do you want for it?"

"Everything in this life is a trade, is it not?" Mila pulled the folded sheets of paper from beneath her shirt and handed them to Rebecca. "This is the only copy," she said.

Rebecca took them without a word, her eyes on Mila's face.

"I will not trade," Mila said softly. "But I will ask you for two favors.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I do not want to go back to jail. You said you can do that. And I want Samuel Lujan discharged from the Army. I'll give you his ID number."

Still silent, Rebecca turned the crumpled pages one by one. Finally, she looked up. Her face was a mask of stillness. The green eyes were ice, but there were shadows in their depths. "You know what you have in this file." Her voice was cold. "You are too bright *not* to know, too bright not to guess how much you could get for it, from me or someone else. Why did you give this to me, Mila?" She waited one heartbeat. Two. "There are people I can hire to dig the truth out of you."

Mila felt goosebumps rise at the cold promise in this woman's voice. She could not trade, she could not sell this file. If she did, part of her soul would go with it, tangled in that ball of platinum string. It would consume her, as it had consumed this woman and her mother. It would own her, in a way that Amelia Connor-Vanek never had. She would spend her life following that string, until she became a shriveled gray husk in a golden kennel. It still tempted her, that *entrada*, that ticket *out* and *up*, her entrance into the world of the towers. *You are like me*, Amelia Connor-Vanek had said, and it was true. Part of her longed to snatch those crumpled pages back from Rebecca, to run headlong into that labyrinth and find the center.

"It is not mine." With an effort, she met Rebecca's sea-ice stare. "Your mother meant this file for you, not for me. I do not want it. What matters to you?" she asked softly. "What is important to *you, Señora* Connor?"

"To be the best." Rebecca's eyes flickered. "But Amelia will never know, will she? I believe you." Her shoulders lifted slightly, as if she had sighed. "My mother would laugh, but I do. Keeping you out of jail is no problem, but it will take a little finesse to get your license reinstated."

"And Sam?"

"Your boyfriend." Rebecca stuffed the folded paper into the pocket of her tunic. "He can reenlist, you know. Unless you want me to stick him with a dishonorable?"

The city had painted out the Little Cambodia mural. She had seen the gray blotch of new paint from the rail. If she had opened that kennel, so many years ago, would the coyote have bolted? Perhaps. Perhaps not—if there was nowhere else to go. She had not opened it. "If he wants to reenlist, it is *his* choice," Mila whispered. "I will not come back here again."

"I was right about one thing." Rebecca's voice halted Mila in the doorway. "There was no suicide note."

Mila turned slowly. Was there a shadow of the coyote's stare in those ice-green eyes, too? What did Amelia's death mean to this woman? Would she blame herself, or would she see her own future in that empty bed?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There was no note," Mila said softly. "*La Señora* would never kill herself. It was an accident—a bad batch of the drug."

She went into the anteroom to wait for the lift. Some things you could not trade. Some things you had to give away. The lift whispered open to take her down and out of this tower world. Not forever. She would find her *entrada*. She would come back. Someday.

"Milagro?" Rebecca stood in the anteroom doorway. "I have this place in Antarctica. Near McMurdo, in the US reservation. The very big fish in this little global pond of ours live there. They pay their employees exorbitantly well. You should be able to pay for the rest of your degree with what you make." She pulled a small card from her pocket. "You have enough money to get there. I paid you for your time." She tossed the card to Mila.

Mila caught it. A key-card, with an address on it. She turned it over in her palm, mouth open to say "no," wanting no obligations, no ties to this woman and her world.

"I wish," Rebecca said softly. "That I had tried to forgive my mother."

She *knew*. Mila curled her fingers around the hard edges of the card, suddenly and intensely sorry for this woman. *Siempre sola*.

"*Gracías*," she said softly.

Some things, perhaps, you had to accept as gifts. ●

Spacesickness
(to Marilyn)

So this is what it's like—
the discoordinating dizziness
wronging the walls/falling
& floating at once/stomach
detached from its moorings &
heart's drum diaphragm tensed
shortening breath with ragged
beats of unease/directionless
anxiety/not even the fond grip
of gravity here to gauge
the ground/immensity of distance
fathomless and dark maw
cat-toothed with stars/untethered
in vibrationless void that rejects
my voice/ears ringing with
silence.

—David Lunde

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AMERICA ONLINE AND DELL MAGAZINES PRESENT YOUR WINDOW INTO THE FUTURE

Connect with the editors of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* and *Analog Science Fiction & Fact Magazine* at "live" events, read Isaac's editorials, and discuss SF—everything from Star Trek to Star Wars and from Asimov to Zelazny—with thousands of fellow SF buffs from coast to coast.

IAsfm is just the beginning as you dive into the world of interactive services with America Online, America's most exciting online service. Download from tens of thousands of useful programs and files, join other unique clubs and special interest groups, communicate with your newfound SF friends through electronic mail, and much more!

Get FREE online time and FREE software to experience Asimov's Science Fiction Center and America Online! Just call 1-800-827-6364, and when asked for your extension number, say 5894, and tell us what kind of computer you have. We'll send an America Online starter kit to you right away!

1-800-827-6364

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

M.C. Sumner

A HANDFUL OF HATCHLINGS

M.C. Sumner lives with his family in a small house on the edge of the Ozark Plateau. He makes all of his living out of his basement—about 75 percent of it by writing software, and the other 25 percent from fiction. His short stories have appeared in *Dragon*, and a number of anthologies, and he has a young adult novel coming out from Harper. "A Handful of Hatchlings" is his first tale for *Asimov's*.

art: Christopher Bing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The wyvern twisted its skinny neck and looked at me with dull yellow eyes. Then it tucked its snout back under a tattered wing and appeared to sleep.

A sign informed me that the animal was a Golden Spade-Tailed Wyvern, the gift of a Chinese emperor, and the oldest resident of the zoo. Another sign warned against throwing coins. The ancient wyvern was half-blind from the impact of errant pennies.

I rested my hands on the brass railing and squinted through the mesh of the cage at the withered sides of the emperor's gift. If the animal's hide had once matched the color of its name, it had since darkened until the whole of the beast was a flat, leathery black. The skin seemed dry and loosely draped over jutting bones. The long snout was wrinkled and incredibly ugly.

I turned away, walked past long rows of exotic lizards and snakes and pushed open the front door of the reptile house, relieved to be free of the thick gamy air. Across a broad walking path, the tall concrete aeries of Dragon Mountain were dotted with visitors. At the grassy base of the artificial hill, children slid over verdigris-stained, life-sized bronzes of a dozen dragon species.

"Find any old friends running loose?" said a voice.

I turned and saw Janey coming toward me up the sloping path. "No," I said. "Looks like they've got all their beasties under lock and key."

She stopped in front of me. "That's good. They'd probably get upset if you started shooting their exhibits." In her colorful dress, and with her face carefully made up, she didn't look much like the Janey I'd fallen in love with. Not that she didn't look awfully good, great actually, just not like the blue-jeans-and-sweatshirt girl I knew. She stared at my face, frowned, and landed a gentle punch on my shoulder. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I said. "Just thinking that you look like you're ready to settle in to city life."

She laughed. "Come off it, cowboy. You're from L.A. I'm the one from Montana, remember?"

I tugged at my wide-brimmed hat, suddenly conscious that it was the only piece of headgear in sight that didn't bear the logo of a sports team.

"I've got someone here I want you to meet," said Janey.

That's when I noticed the kid standing behind her. He was a head taller than me, skinny, with the kind of flannel shirt and sleeveless vest that rich college kids wear when they want to look "woodsy."

He stepped forward and stuck out a long hand. "I'm Thom Marion. Thom with an 'h,' " he said. "I work with the Drake Rehabilitation Center. We help animals that have been shot, or hit by cars, or things like that."

"Doesn't that sound wonderful?" asked Janey as I shook his hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sure," I said, "very nice."

"Thom, this is my friend Bill Mackie."

He pulled his hand back sharply. "The one that used to shoot endangered species from an airplane?"

"Look," I said. "I only shot one endangered wyvern in my whole life. I paid a big fine, lost my license, and I'm sorry as heck. Okay?"

Janey stepped between us. "Thom was just telling me something interesting. Why don't you tell Bill about it?"

"We've got a problem," said Thom-with-an-"h." "And we were hoping that, with Ms. Bochie's experience in working with large drakes, she might be able to help us."

I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach.

"There's this dragon," he said. "It's nesting on a building downtown."

"Take a look." Janey handed the binoculars to me.

I squinted, turning the knob until the monolithic side of the building jumped into clear view. At first I saw nothing but acres of tinted glass and panel after panel of imported Italian marble. Then I came to a ledge and saw the dark mass of material that was gathered there. "I see something that looks like a pile of wood. Is that it?"

"Yes," said Janey. "It's the nest of a large drake."

"Drake?" I said, lowering the binoculars. "You mean it is a dragon?"

"Or a really large wyvern." She shrugged. "Arboreal species of both families build similar nests. Has to be a wyvern, I guess, no dragons in the U.S. But I've never seen one build a nest like this."

"Oh, it's a dragon," said Thom. "I've seen it myself."

I handed the binoculars back to Janey. "Whatever it is, that nest looks big enough to raise a family of buffalo."

Janey spent a few seconds looking at the nest again, then gave the binoculars to Thom. "No sign of the nest maker at the moment. Okay, so you've got a large drake nesting in an urban area. It's unusual, but exactly what is the problem? Has the drake hurt anyone?"

"Naw," said Thom. "Nothing like that. The problem is with Americo Life Insurance, the building's owner. They're worried about damage to the building, tenants leaving, lawsuits, things like that. They've gone to the city and gotten a permit to trap or kill the dragon. They're going after it today."

"How long has the nest been there?" asked Janey.

"Over a month. Almost two."

Thom and Janey stared at each other with such force I had to break in. "Would somebody mind telling me why that's important?"

"A big drake only nests for one reason," said Janey, "to lay eggs. And

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

if the nest has been there for as long as Thom says, the eggs must be near to hatching."

"Great," I said. "Just what we need. A big lizard with a nest full of eggs."

"Those babies will need food within a few hours of hatching. If they take away the mother now, the babies will die." Janey turned to Thom. "Is your center equipped to care for drake infants?"

Thom nodded.

"Then let's go."

By the time we'd gone back to our hotel and changed clothes, swung by the Drake Rehabilitation Center for some equipment, and waded our way through the representatives of Americo Life, the sun had dipped below the lower buildings to the west and the sky was beginning to get dark. At last, accompanied by a security guard and an elevator full of gear, we were headed for the thirty-sixth floor.

It was a maintenance floor, with knots of industrial air conditioners, elevator motors, and power boxes spaced in a huge expanse of unfinished concrete. There were no windows, but the guard showed us an access panel that led out to the ledge.

I grabbed the handle of the panel and started to turn.

"Watch out for the pressure differential," said the security guard.

Immediately the hatch was pulled out of my hand with enough force that it almost took me with it. I found myself with my legs still inside the building, my chest lying on the ledge and my head hanging in the void with a great view of the street five hundred feet below. Hands grabbed at my belt and hauled me back inside.

Janey held me by the shoulders and said something, but I couldn't hear it over the pounding of my heart. She helped me away from the opening, and I took a few minutes to catch my breath.

"Be careful, Bill," said Janey. "Here, put on your harness." She handed me a contraption of nylon straps and buckles hung with aluminum D-Rings. Attached to one side was a length of colorful rope that ended with a spring-loaded clip. I turned the thing round and round, trying to figure out how to put it on. "What do we do with this?"

"There's a cable strung above the ledge that's used by the window washing platform," said Thom. "We can clip our ropes onto that."

When I had finally struggled into my harness, I saw that Janey and Thom had already gotten into their gear and were advancing on the open hatch. "Have I got this right?" I asked.

Janey stepped back from the panel and gave my harness a couple of tugs. She tightened one of the buckles until it was painfully snug. "Looks good," she said. "Ready to go out?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I walked over to the hatch. A strong wind was still gusting through the opening. "Can't we wait for the wind to calm down?"

"Wind never calms," volunteered the security guard. "It's the pressure. . . ."

"Right," I said. "The pressure differential." I stuck my head out and looked down the ledge. At the corner of the building, through some whim of the architect's design, the ledge belled out into a platform at least thirty feet on a side. That was where the drake had built its nest. In between the nest and the hatch was fifty feet of ledge that was something less than a yard wide. And when I looked over the edge . . .

I jerked back inside, panting.

Janey was looking at me funny. "Don't tell me that William Mackie, ace pilot, is afraid of heights?"

"There is a big difference between flying a plane and hanging on the side of a building," I said.

"Yeah," said Thom, coming up beside us. "Planes can fall. Ropes are more trustworthy."

"Look," I said, "I've put in thousands of hours in the air and I've never had an accident."

"What about . . ." started Janey.

"Okay. One accident, but it wasn't the plane's fault."

"It's okay, Janey," said Thom. "I'll go out first."

"Oh no, you won't." I walked over to the hatch and leaned out, fighting my reeling stomach.

"Will you both just get out of the way?" said Janey. She reached through the hatch and snapped her rope onto the stout cable. Then she boosted herself through the opening and walked slowly away down the ledge.

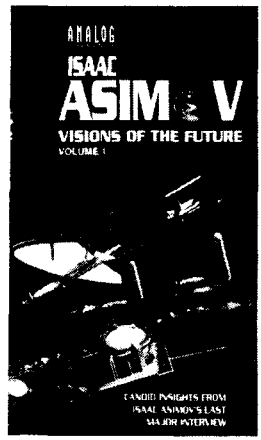
Just watching her made me dizzy, but I reached up with numb fingers and buckled myself on. One last silent prayer and I followed her toward the nest.

The ledge was made of the same polished marble as the rest of the stonework. Not the best surface in the world to walk on. Add to that the attention it had obviously garnered from the city's pigeons, and it made for pretty unhealthy footing. I took a few moments to decide between facing the street or facing the wall. I decided I wanted the edge in front of me where I could keep an eye on it, so I slid along the ledge with the wall at my back.

One foot at a time, I moved toward the nest. Where we stood near the top of the building, the tower was stained red by the setting sun. When I risked a look down, I could see that the base of the building was already in darkness and the cars on the street below had turned on their lights. It seemed like I traveled miles down that ledge before my foot bumped

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ANALOG PRESENTS
ISAAC ASIMOV'S VISIONS OF THE FUTURE



LOOK INTO THE FUTURE WITH ONE OF THE GREATEST SCIENCE/ SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The Premier Edition of an important video series, totally original and totally new.

Isaac Asimov's Visions Of The Future- as dynamic and inspiring as science fiction- is presented in this ambitious new video series. Isaac Asimov guided the series development, and in his last major interview, he spoke eloquently about a world being shaped by the work done in today's laboratories and research centers.

- **Robots and Robotics**
- **Genetic Engineering**
- **Nanotechnology**
- **Deep Space Travel**
- **Terraforming Planets**
- **Artificial Intelligence**

Be sure to add this very special video to your collection, and look for the next volume of Analog Presents Isaac Asimov's Visions Of The Future to be released soon.

Order This Collector's Edition Today! Only $19.95 plus $4.95 shipping and handling.

YES! I WANT TO RECEIVE THE PREMIER EDITION OF ISAAC ASIMOV'S VISIONS OF THE FUTURE VIDEO.
Enclosed is my check or money order for $19.95 plus $4.95 shipping and handling.

☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa
☐ Check or Money Order
Card #_____
Exp. Date_____
Signature_____
OR CALL: 1-800-486-5347
Ask for Asimov's Vision

Send your order to:
Isaac Asimov's Visions Of The Future
Quality Video Inc.
Pentagon Towers
P.O. Box 36190
Minneapolis, MN 55435-6190

Please send my video to:
Name:_____
Address:_____Apt.:_____
City:_____State:_____Zip:_____

Video available in VHS only. Minnesota residents add 6.5% sales tax. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

against a chunk of driftwood that must have been dropped by the builder of the giant nest. The knot of wood tottered for a moment, then tipped and plunged off the ledge. "Oops," I said, hoping that no one chanced to be walking by below.

A few more steps and I was away from the narrow part of the ledge and onto the relative safety of the wide corner platform. I looked around and saw Janey kneeling among the scraps of rotting wood and rusty metal that made up the nest.

"Any eggs?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Not eggs. Babies." She lifted a tiny beast from the pile of debris. The hatchling moved slowly, holding its red-lined mouth open toward her. I noted that it already had a full complement of small, but wicked-looking, teeth. "There's five of them," she said. "They all seem to be healthy."

Thom stepped out onto the ledge. He moved with the assurance of a veteran rock climber, crossing the ledge in a few quick hops, and dropped easily into the nest. He reached for one of the babies. "See," he said, "told you it was a dragon."

The baby he was holding not only had a pair of wings, but four legs as well. Though I was no real expert on drakes, I knew enough to recognize the one clear characteristic that separated the two families of flying reptiles: wyverns have two legs, dragons have four.

The babies were about the size of adult cats, with droopy, wet looking wings that were far too small to support their weight. They were emerald green, with stripes of yellow and red that looked artificial. If they hadn't been moving, I would have sworn they were the product of some toy company

Janey was examining the intricate markings on their bellies. "From what I can remember of juvenile dragons, these are either one of the Welsh varieties or some African species."

"What are they doing here?" I asked.

"Somebody probably brought in the parents as pets," said Thom. "We had some rich hotshot that actually smuggled in a pair of African Red-eyes a few years back. Real conversation piece . . . until they ate him."

"Well, these little fellows must have all hatched within the last couple of hours," said Janey. "Their egg teeth are still attached." She stood up and brushed rotted wood from her jeans. "Okay. Thom, you take one of those babies inside, get the cages set up, and come back for another. Bill and I will make some measurements out here, then bring in the rest."

Thom gave an casual salute and stepped out onto the ledge. In seconds, he was inside with the first baby.

Janey had me go through the nest, calling out the sizes of the bits of refuse used in its construction. Among the items I found were a pair of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wooden bar stools, a large number of old mattress springs, and a neat stack of chrome hubcaps. When Janey had gotten this information down in her note pad, we used a tape measure to get the diameter of the roughly circular nest. We hadn't finished before the sun slipped behind the horizon and it was suddenly and almost completely dark. The only illumination was provided by the distant lights on the street below and by a sky that glowed with the yellow-brown reflection of those lights.

Thom came bouncing back along the window ledge with a flashlight in hand. "The first one's tucked away," he said. "Ready for another?"

"There's nothing else we can do here in the dark," said Janey. "Let's get the babies inside, and we can come back to finish looking at the nest in the morning."

I was none too excited about the idea of another day spent out on the ledge, but I was awfully anxious to get back inside. I handed one hatchling to Janey, and another to Thom. The last two had crawled under a length of rotting tree, and it took me a few seconds to work one loose.

Thom helped Janey back onto the ledge, giving her a little more assistance than I thought she needed. As Janey started her walk along the ledge, I noticed that the security guard had stuck his head through the hatch and was waving at us madly. He was shouting something, but the wind snatched his words away.

"What's he saying?" asked Thom.

"I think he's trying to tell us that their plan to trap the mother didn't pan out," I told him.

"How do you know?"

"Look." I pointed past his shoulder.

A shadow moved across the evening sky, an inky shape that was growing larger with frightening speed.

"Janey!" I shouted. "Run!" I turned to Thom. "Quick, get inside." Thom's eyes were fastened on the approaching shape. Not risking a glance myself, I shook him. "Come on, get moving!"

Thom snapped out of it and jumped out onto the ledge, encumbered by the baby under his arm. He took a step, overbalanced, whirled his free arm, and barely remained upright. He took another step toward the open hatch.

I climbed onto the ledge, the fourth baby tucked under my arm. The dragon came rushing past with a roar that made my bones vibrate. Just ahead of me, Thom took another step, but his eyes were on the dragon, not on the ledge, and his step took him into space.

I scrambled forward, falling to my knees as I approached the spot where Thom had vanished, and peered downward at the dizzying view. At first I didn't see Thom. A shout from my right showed me that his rope had held and he was swinging only a few feet below the ledge.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The dragon shot past again. The clawed tip of its wing struck the building above my head, gouging a path through a metal frame and showering me with chips of broken marble. The wind of its passage almost sent me down to join Thom, but I managed to crawl along the ledge to the hatch and shove the squalling baby drake into Janey's waiting hands.

The dragon was coming. I didn't have to look to know that, I could feel it, like a pressure coming down from above. I lay on my belly, reaching blindly downward, and managed to grasp Thom's upraised hand.

Thom came over the ledge with blood pouring from his swollen nose.

The dragon went screaming past just below us.

My arm was wrenched as some part of the dragon struck Thom. His face went pale, and his eyes rolled back. I heard glass shatter as the dragon hit the windows on the floor below.

Another pull brought Thom's shoulders into view. Amazingly, the baby dragon was still with him, its tiny claws digging into his plaid shirt. I dropped his limp hand, grabbed his harness, and shoved him and the baby through the hatch. Then I dived through headfirst, landing between a pair of yowling baby dragons.

The mother dragon made another pass, its head sweeping just above the ledge. With a clatter of metal and the crack of breaking wood, it landed heavily in the nest. It stretched its long neck toward us and made a last bellow of protest. Then the horse-sized head fell into the nest.

For long minutes, no one moved. We sat there on the concrete floor in the dark, just breathing. I, for one, was glad to be breathing.

Janey got up and went over to Thom. She shone her flashlight into his eyes, and gingerly lifted the cuff of his jeans. "The wing must have struck him in the shin," she said. "There's a compound fracture here. It's not bleeding badly, but it's going to hurt like hell when he comes to."

"Uh, why don't I go call for an ambulance?" asked the security guard.

"Why don't you?" I said.

The guard walked away, and Janey took her flashlight over to the hatch. I followed, rubbing at the strained muscles in my left arm.

"Look," said Janey. The white circle of her light glinted off a metal bolt that protruded from the thick tail of the dragon. As she moved the light up the body, wounds could be seen in its back, its legs, its neck.

"Good God," I said.

Janey nodded. "Looks like their capture plan wasn't very neat."

I wrapped my aching arm across her shoulders, feeling her painful tension. "I'm sorry."

She pulled away. "We've got to get the last baby."

"What? Now?"

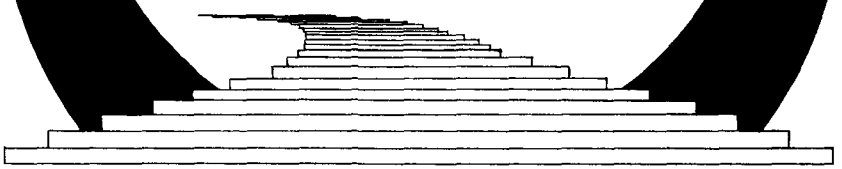
"Yes."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Asimov's
SCIENCE FICTION

ENTER ANOTHER DIMENSION.

Explore worlds of imagination with stories by Roger Zelazny, Robert Silverberg— and, Connie Willis



SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE OVER 28% OFF THE BASIC PRICE

❑ Please send me 18 issues of ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION for only $29.95--I save over 28% off the basic price.

❑ Please send me 12 issues for only $20.97.

OR CALL 1-800-333-4108

[ ] Payment Enclosed [ ] Bill Me

[ ] Charge (Circle one) MasterCard VISA

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Card# _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Outside US & Poss 12 for $27.97, 18 for $39.97. (cash with order US funds). Price Includes GST.

Mail to: **Asimov's**
P.O. Box 7058
Red Oak, IA 51591

We publish two double issues,in April and November.
Each double issue counts as two issues towards your subscription.

HRSC-5

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I looked out at the dark mass of the dragon. "Are you nuts? You want to go back onto a ledge, five hundred feet in the air, in the dark, and steal a baby dragon away from its mother. While the mother's there. Oh, and besides that, the dragon's hurt. Have I got it right?"

She put her hand on my arm. "Bill, that dragon is mortally wounded. It may even be dead already. If it's dead, the baby will starve before morning. If the mother's still alive, it could easily crush the baby in its death throes." She moved away from me, quickly inspected her harness, and began to climb though the hatch.

I knew that if I gave myself time to think, my knees would start shaking far too much to ever walk that slippery ledge, so I clambered through the hatch right behind her. It seemed quieter now. The traffic in the streets had diminished to a trickle, and many of the buildings were dark. Night birds flew past, and I saw a larger shape that might have been some small urban drake out to catch its evening meal. Out on the river, the tugboats had turned on their searchlights, and the wide beams swept endlessly across the brown water. I reached the nest and stepped carefully into the loose mass of material.

There were soft clanks of metal as Janey searched through the nest for the last baby. "I don't see it," she whispered. "I'm afraid the mother might have landed on it."

I edged forward, my eyes on the bulky form of the inert dragon. "I'll look." I tripped over a piece of wood and almost stepped on the dragon's tail.

"Careful!" hissed Janey.

"Right, right. Wait a minute, I see something. Shine your light over here."

She turned her flashlight where I pointed, and the light caught the brilliant green of the baby. It was sitting beside the foreleg of its fallen parent, its tiny claws scratching weakly at the adult dragon's scaly hide. When the light struck it, the baby turned toward us and let out a pitiful cry.

"Come here, little guy," I said. I stepped carefully through the debris of the nest and reached down for the tiny dragon. Its side was wet with the blood of its mother.

"Okay," said Janey. "Let's go."

The baby dragon bit me. Its needle-sharp teeth sliced into the tender skin between my thumb and index finger. I stumbled back with the baby dangling from my hand and fell against the mother dragon.

The big dragon surged to its feet. Its neck whipped around and the warm wash of its breath swept over me. For a moment I was staring into the fist-sized eye, then the jaws darted forward and yellow sparks flashed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as the dragon's teeth closed on the metal rings of my harness. It lifted me from the ground and tossed me over the side.

The baby dragon screamed as we fell. There was an abrupt jerk as we hit the end of the belay, everything swung sideways, then I was through the window that the dragon had shattered in its attack on Thom. Either the dragon's teeth or the glass of the window must have weakened the rope. It parted and I fell to the floor.

I lay on my face in a carpeted office on the thirty-fifth floor, my hands and arms cut by broken glass. The baby dragon released its death-grip on my bleeding hand and crawled away. Behind me the mother dragon bellowed.

I climbed to my feet and went to the broken window. "Janey! You okay?" No answer.

There was a whistling sound from above. It started out high and distant, but the pitch went down and the volume went rapidly up. The dragon was coming. Fast. I turned, bent, grabbed the baby by its tail, and ran from the office.

The wall of windows imploded as the dragon smashed its way into the building.

I ran out into the hallway, trying to move and look back at the same time, stumbling against furniture, looking for some clue that would lead me toward the elevators. The dragon smashed easily through the plaster wall of the office. Wings folded, it came down the hall with rapid steps, its shoulders knocking pictures from the walls and its taloned feet tearing at the carpet. I slid around a corner as the dragon swatted aside desks and office chairs. The baby dragon clawed at the air as he swung by his tail from my hand. I started toward an open door when I spotted the white and red of an exit sign glowing in the distance. Putting everything I had into it, I sprinted toward the sign.

The exit sign didn't mark the elevators, it marked the door to the stairs. At the moment, the idea of going down thirty-five flights of stairs didn't sound bad at all—as long as the dragon wouldn't fit. I grabbed the door and pulled.

It was locked.

"You can't do this!" I shouted at the door. "There's a fire code!"

A copy machine went tumbling down the hall behind me, and I turned to see the dragon smashing her way through a series of flimsy partitions. I ran on.

Sure that I was heading toward the center of the building, I ran past dozens of offices and hallways. Then I turned through a wide door flanked with potted trees, passed a long conference table, and came to a dead end. It was a corner office, windows on two sides, with a huge glass-top desk, sparse arrogantly modern furniture, and a pair of fancy floor lamps.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Obviously, it was the lair of some big time executive. I would have preferred a broom closet.

The elevator bell sounded, tantalizingly near. I turned to retrace my steps.

The dragon turned the corner, blocking my path. It had slowed to a stumbling walk. Blood poured from the wounds on its head and neck, splashing on the tasteful carpet. It made a coughing noise, and bloody froth spilled from its mouth. With a shudder that sent nearby furniture flying, the dragon collapsed. The slit-pupiled eyes closed.

I leaned back against the glass desk, the adrenaline draining from my body and leaving me with painful fatigue. I could hear the faint sound of sirens from the street outside. By now every police car, fire truck, and ambulance in the city was probably on its way.

The baby dragon made a plaintive cry.

Immediately, the big dragon's head came up and it let out a hiss like a ruptured steam boiler. It pushed through the office door, widening the frame significantly. It snapped at me, its teeth coming within arm's length of my head.

I dropped the baby and looked frantically around the office for anything that could be a weapon. Grabbing one of the tall floor lamps, I made a major league swing, smashing the base of the lamp into the jaw of the dragon.

The dragon lifted a foreleg and slammed the lamp from my hands. A sideswipe of its head threw me against the glass wall, a fine spider web of cracks radiating out from my impact. The head lowered slowly, the bloody snout opening.

Janey ran into the room and snatched up the lamp. As the dragon started to turn her way, she jammed the business end of the lamp right down its throat.

The long neck snapped back, arching over the dragon's bleeding body. Blue fire played along its teeth, and smoke came from its dozens of wounds. The beast's eyes turned milky, then black.

Steam curling from its nostrils, the great head swung down.

I looked up, unable to move, as the head struck me, knocked me through the broken window, and sent me into darkness.

I opened my eyes, stared at the ceiling, and said, "I'm not dead."

"Well, you're obviously as brilliant as you ever were." Janey leaned into my blurry, rotating field of view. She reached down and ran a hand softly over my cheek. "You've been out for almost twenty hours," she said. "How do you feel?"

I tried to sit up, but my stomach and head told me that lying down

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a much better idea. "Terrible, but not as bad as I expected. I thought I was going to be a wet spot on Broadway."

Janey smiled. "You would have been, if the dragon's neck hadn't fallen across your legs and pinned you down."

I closed my eyes, hoping I could get back to sleep before the twinges of pain that I was beginning to feel became full-blown agony.

"Oh," said Janey. "I got a phone call while you were under. Another job offer."

"I hope it's studying butterflies," I said.

I fell asleep to the sound of her laughter. ●

NEXT ISSUE

Some of our most popular writers return next month to headline our March issue—and, not coincidentally, they are also among the most prominent and respected writers in science fiction today. First up is multiple Hugo- and Nebula-winner **Connie Willis,** who returns with our March cover story, "Death on the Nile," the compelling tale of one woman's dream vacation trip to modern-day Egypt—a trip that soon leads her on a quest of self-discovery far more profound and bizarre than anything she could have bargained for.... This is Willis at her best: wry, funny, and ultimately quite moving, the way that only Connie can do it—don't miss it. (The evocative cover is by hot new British artist **Mark Harrison.**) Hugo- and Nebula-winner **Nancy Kress** is also on hand for March, spinning the vivid and *very* powerful story of a man who finds that nothing in his life is really *quite* what it seems, as he learns the dreadful price that must be paid to enable him to be "Martin on a Wednesday"; then multiple Hugo-winner **Mike Resnick** gives us all front-row seats at what surely must be the oddest boxing match of all time, with the life or death of millions and the fate of nations at stake, as he details what happens to "Mwalimu in the Squared Circle."

ALSO IN MARCH: veteran author **Tom Purdom** takes us on a wild quest through time, as a desperate man strives to bring about "The Redemption of August"; new writer **Kandis Elliot** makes a brilliant *Asimov's* debut with the lyrical and bittersweet story of what it feels like to be "Driving the Chevy Biscayne to Oblivion"; **M. Shayne Bell** takes us to a near-future Africa in the relentless grip of ever-increasing desertification for the moving story of what "The King's Kiss" can still mean in such a world; new writer **Kathleen Ann Goonan** returns to spin a engrossing tale of love, loss, and the persistence of memory, in "The Parrot Man"; **Joseph F. Pumilia** makes a fast-paced and exciting *Asimov's* debut with the story of a man who finds a sight a lot *more* eye-opening than he'd expected to find, when he goes on a "Vision Quest" in the deserts of the American Southwest; and **Don Webb** returns with an intricate and disturbing look at just how tangled up and interrelated the lives of a group of young people can get, once they've made "The Pact." Plus an array of columns and features. Look for our jam-packed March issue on sale on your newsstands on February 2, 1993.

COMING SOON: **Isaac Asimov**'s last—and greatest—Foundation novella. Plus major new work by **Pat Murphy, Lucius Shepard, Lisa Goldstein, Michael Swanwick, R. Garcia y Robertson, Mary Rosenblum,** and many more.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

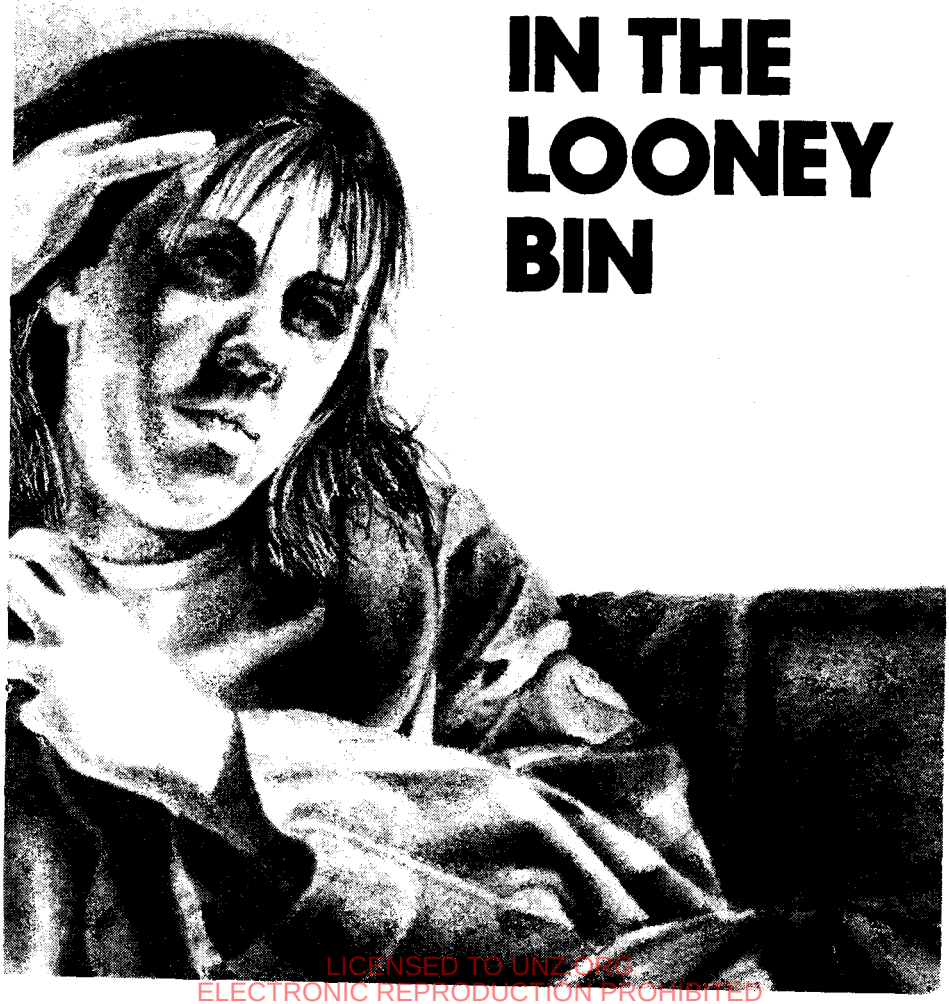
LICENSED TO UNZ ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maggie Flinn is a rheumatologist with the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Nashua, New Hampshire. She is the assistant director of the Boston City Hospital Arthritis Clinic and an assistant clinical professor at Boston University's School of Medicine as well. Dr. Flinn lives just outside of Boston with her three sons. Although "One Morning in the Looney Bin" was her first sale, it is her second story to be published in *Asimov's*. Dr. Flinn recently sold a new story to *Omni* as well.

art: Steve Cavallo

Maggie Flinn

ONE MORNING IN THE LOONEY BIN



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maybe today wouldn't be so bad. Reilly had been wishing so hard for just *one* day to not be so bad, if she'd been using pennies, she'd have filled a twenty-foot well three years ago.

Sunlight was just creeping in through the narrow blinds, which meant it had to be after six. They'd be bringing the breakfast trays in another hour. Not that she would eat. Reilly never ate for at least the first three days of any admission, if she could get away with it. She thought it looked more convincing, like maybe she was only just depressed. She could always pretend she had an appetite later. When she wanted to get out. Now, she had to get up. The suprapubic pressure was reaching pain threshold; at least she could always count on her bladder to get her out of bed.

Getting to the bathroom wasn't going to prove so easy. Two days of refusing food and drink had left her more than a little lightheaded when attempting any sudden postural changes, and she swayed and almost fell as she got up. Resting for a minute at the side of the bed, the thought of breakfast took on greater appeal. The sick grayness began to pass. Reilly once again started for the bathroom. She was just as glad there was no mirror in the room. She'd thought it strange at first, a bathroom with no mirror, but some other patient, months ago, had managed to smash one, and had inflicted heavy damage on two ward attendants with a sliver of glass before she'd bloodied herself, or so Reilly had been told by the admitting clerk the first night. They had decided not to replace the mirror, she'd said. The clerk had rambled on about how instead they'd just designated the room to be reserved for the psychos, all the really violent cases, or at least for those just up from isolation. Reilly remembered the young woman's face as she realized what she'd just said, and to whom, the way the scarlet flush faded rapidly to plaster white, the way she'd hastily retreated from the room, almost running.

Glancing into the toilet bowl as she flushed, Reilly could picture well enough the peculiar yellow tinge that her face must have developed by now; it had to be real close to morning-urine yellow. She didn't need a mirror for *that*, but it might have helped for the rest. She hadn't been able to work the comb through her hair again yesterday, the tangles being some weeks old by now; having a mirror wasn't going to help that, either. She brushed her teeth twice thoroughly, but still couldn't cleanse her mouth of the bitter metallic taste she'd acquired days ago.

Unable to muster the energy to shower, she reached for the striped pink robe she'd hung on the back of the bathroom door, and pulled it on over her nightshirt. The robe dragged a bit on the floor, but it made her feel small, and she liked that. She wondered briefly who had packed her things for her *this* time. Maybe Judy, one of the lab techs she'd tried to become friendly with. They'd got to talking over the mice, and together

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had worked out a new immobilizing device that had made the tail vein injections much easier. But then Judy had walked into the lab that last day, right at the end. No, it wouldn't have been Judy, then—not after what she'd seen. So much for developing *that* friendship. Maybe her landlady had rummaged through her apartment and packed her things, as she had once before. *Some*one ought to get a thank-you note, Reilly thought, as both the robe and her clothes had preceded her arrival here, her transfer from the locked state facility. She'd brought the robe with her one time, at some other hospital some years back, but they hadn't let her wear it. Regulations, they said. Reilly had never bothered to try to bring it again.

They had *rules* here, not regulations. Reilly hadn't quite figured out the difference, other than the spelling, yet. Rule number one, get out of bed every morning. It actually made sense, so maybe *that* was the difference, she thought, as she headed out and down the hall. There was an exquisite stillness to the corridor this early in the morning, which captured her for a moment. If only she could pocket it, or catch the quiet and imprison it in a private bottle, then she could take it out and let it envelop her anytime she needed it. Then maybe she wouldn't need *this* place, she thought.

Reilly walked on slowly, past the nursing station to the common room. From here, she could see out through the large floor-to-ceiling windows. Outside. It wasn't really Outside, of course. It was really just an enclosed garden with a high curved orange brick wall. You could walk the path slowly, contemplatively, and still be back where you started in thirty-seven seconds. Looking past the nursing station, she saw again the locked double doors with the tiny square windows, windows set so high up that she'd needed to stand on her toes yesterday to look through the chicken wire embedded in an inch of glass. Through there was the rest of the hospital, the part for *sick* people, as opposed to loonies. Reilly had tried that part once, in a different hospital a long time ago. The experience hadn't been worth repeating.

Then again, *most* of her experiences in hospitals were not worth repeating. Like the hour she'd spent waiting alone in one of the little offices tucked in behind the nurses' station, the day she was admitted here. Offices supposedly reserved for the doctors' needs, whatever *they* were. Four white walls, no windows, two chairs, no desk, no pictures. Or yesterday's group therapy session. Now *that* had been bizarre, but worth repeating? No, probably not. Why should group therapy be any different here? Now, where is *this* attitude going to get you, she silently questioned herself, you stupid idiot? Nowhere, as usual, she answered herself, dropping hard onto the green plastic couch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Excuse me," shrilled a voice from behind her, "but breakfast won't be for another forty-five minutes, so why don't you go clean up for the day?"

Reilly ignored it. She refused to acknowledge anyone in authority the first time they spoke, a point of honor, a matter of pride . . . or maybe just habit, she wasn't sure. But it always pissed people off, so, what the hell, she kept on with it.

"*Excuse* me, Miss," said the voice, a little louder, a little more shrill. Reilly counted to six before the next "excuse me."

This one sounded sufficiently annoyed, so Reilly turned, and, with calculated innocence, answered, "Yes?"

"Breakfast won't be for a while yet. Why don't you go get yourself cleaned up?"

These words were uttered by a woman she hadn't seen so far. But then, you don't get to know all the staff in just two days, she told herself, especially not when you're always hiding in your room. *This* one was big and ugly and probably not nearly as old as she looked. Maybe only really forty-seven or forty-eight, but the rat-gray hair and red face and unbleached moustache were enough to send Reilly back to her original plan of refusing breakfast again.

"I brushed my teeth," protested Reilly, knowing full well that was not the issue.

"That's a start," the nurse replied.

She *had* to be a nurse, because she had a tiny name tag over her overly large left breast that said Mary Connell, RN. The staff all wore regular clothes, no white suits or jackets or anything, so you had to read the tags. You didn't actually have to read the initials to figure out who was who, because the doctors didn't wear name tags, and the nurses—well, in general they were about as obvious as the doctors.

"Just what do you mean?" Reilly asked.

"Well, how about your hair? I don't see how you can even get a comb through it, it's such a squirrel's nest. Why don't you start there?"

"Why do you think it isn't combed? I can't get a comb *through* it, so how *can* I comb it?"

"Maybe it's time for a haircut," Nurse Connell snapped back.

"Just give me the scissors, and I'll do it myself," Reilly replied, flashing a sickeningly sweet smile before turning back to face the garden windows.

"I'm not sure that's a particularly wise thing to do," Connell said slowly.

Reilly visualized steam coming from the nurse's nostrils.

"You must be Reilly Grant," Connell continued. "I got a report on you, you know. I heard about the damage you caused. They actually gave us a special warning about you. 'Dangerous, prone to unexpected violence,'

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is, I think, one way they phrased it. I heard they wouldn't even take you back, over at El Camino State. But this is no El Camino, Reilly," she said. "Don't worry, my dear, I *know* how to deal with girls like *you*."

"I'll just bet you do," Reilly mumbled under her breath, while concentrating on tear production.

"*What* was that you said?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," Reilly lied, with her tear ducts obliging her now, beginning to flow. She sniffled loudly, realizing that the nurse couldn't quite see her face.

"Interesting," said a new voice, directly behind her.

Reilly jerked her head around, moving too quickly once again. Struggling to focus, she reached for the back of the sofa for support as the room spun around her. When her view stabilized, she found herself facing a large man with pure gray eyes, eyes which seemed luminous in the early morning light. Seeing him, she stifled her automatic caustic "excuse *me*?" and just stared. His name was Judas—or so he'd introduced himself in group yesterday, anyway, the first time she'd seen him. Finally, someone with a name she didn't automatically forget!

"Interesting," he repeated, "you actually bothered to produce tears for her. Why?"

"Just staying in practice," she answered, astounded by her honesty.

It was difficult to move her eyes from his. She could look away and still see those strange eyes. He blinked, and she saw his sandy brown hair, quite short and sprinkled evenly with gray. She hadn't noticed the gray yesterday. She'd been too entranced by his introduction during the group meeting. Staring back into his eyes, she couldn't keep from grinning as she remembered. He'd said he was Judas, come back from the dead. Jesus was giving him one final chance to redeem himself. One final good deed, and then the pearly gates would open for him and he'd be out of Purgatory and walking down the golden streets, all the angels lined up to greet him, just waiting to belt out their heavenly chorus. He said he still had the thirty pieces of silver, and he had to give them away, but to just the right person. Someone who could make the best use of them. But he was having trouble figuring out who the right person was. The rest of the session ran wild, so wild they never got around to some of the introductions. She hadn't had to say a word, not even her name. It seemed like everyone in the room was more deserving than the next, at least to hear them describe themselves.

Her favorite had been Pancho. Reilly had noticed him right off, a skinny little runt who didn't even look old enough to be in an adult ward. He claimed that since he'd been labeled a complete sociopath, with no sense of moral judgment as to what was right or wrong, *he* had to be the perfect candidate for the blood money. The fact that it was tainted money

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was meaningless to him. Anyone *else* taking the money couldn't use it without guilt—he *could*. She almost saw the logic in it. He certainly seemed to have caught Judas's attention; at least, they left the session together. She'd seen them later in the afternoon as well, off in a corner of the lounge together, talking quietly.

"Remember me, do you?" Judas asked gently, smiling.

"Sure," she answered, noncommittally, not yet ready to admit just what she remembered, or how much she'd enjoyed remembering it.

"Turn back around," he suggested, still smiling, "we can manage without the scissors. Slowly, and you won't feel so dizzy."

Unable to come up with a single reason to decline, Reilly turned and faced the windows once again, having seen Connell fade into the tiny warren of rooms filled with medicines and needles and papers and all manner of instruments hidden behind the station, no access allowed to her sort. She felt fingers move softly through her hair, loosening, gliding, easing the Gordian knots formed after more than three weeks of deliberate neglect. Not total neglect, she thought, I did wash, I just didn't comb.

"Don't you want a comb?" she asked, eyes closed.

"Shh, you'll disturb my concentration. I'm almost done, anyway."

She relaxed her back against the cushions, feeling gentle pressure escalate to firm, running from her forehead up over the top of her skull, down around both ears as her hair was lifted off the nape of her neck. As she leaned forward again, she felt it fall like a satin drape past her shoulders to dance just above her lumbar spine.

"Done," he said. "I can certainly see why you'd choose your hair, as part of your symptom complex, I mean. What a lovely color, auburn, wouldn't you say?"

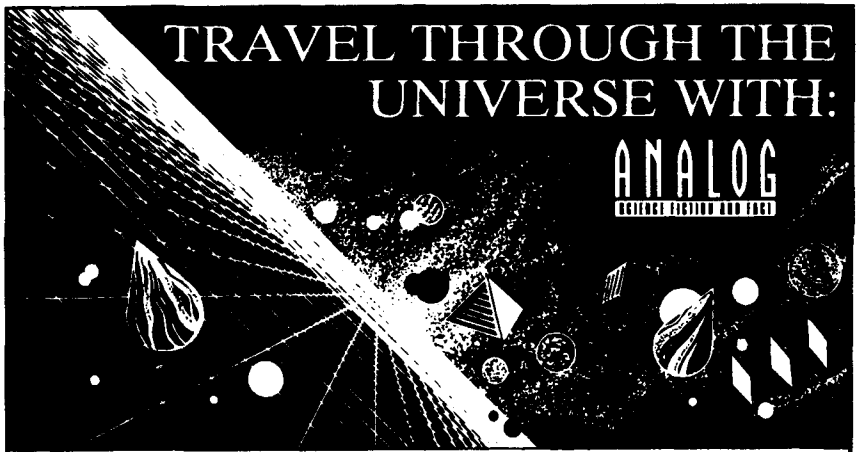
Turning again toward him, slowly, she answered softly, "I don't understand."

"Sure you do, but never mind that now. Breakfast has arrived, and, as a matter of fact, so have the others." He turned his head and she followed his gaze around the room.

The odd unmatched chairs and sofas were now occupied. She hadn't noticed the room change from unoccupied to almost overflowing. Instead of the early morning silence, the room now buzzed with voices, some loud, some just murmurs and greetings. She recognized some faces, but remembered no names from the last two days. Except Pancho—she'd remembered that, but he didn't seem to be around. Most everyone was already eating, trays on their laps, carefully manipulating coffee cups and plastic silverware, the one table in the room being too low to use comfortably for dining.

"Come," said Judas with the pure gray eyes, "get a tray—no one will take our seats." He held out his hand, she placed hers within it and rose

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Each issue of Analog Science Fiction & Fact blazes the way to bold new discoveries. The stories in Analog begin with a scientific base that stretches beyond your imagination. Start your subscription today and travel to distant places and times where fiction becomes fact.

Subscribe today and save over 28% off the basic price.

- ❑ Please send me 18 issues for $29.95-I save 28% off the basic price.
- ❑ Please send me 12 issues for only $20.97.
- ❑ Check enclosed
- ❑ Please bill me

MRSA-3

Name_____

Address_____

_____

Mail to:
Analog
P.O. Box 7060
Red Oak, IA 51591

Outside US & Poss. 12 for $25.97, 18 for $38.75. Price includes GST.

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue.

All foreign orders must be paid in advance in US funds.

We publish 2 double issues, in January and July. Each double issue counts as 2 issues towards your subscription.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

slowly to join him. The rack of dining trays was just inside the main door, the chicken-wire window door, as she'd come to think of it. Reilly recognized cinnamon and maple syrup in the air, and suddenly she had a very strange sensation emanating from deep inside, a not unpleasant gnawing ache in her epigastric region.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"Yes, I guess that *is* what you call it." Reilly heard the surprise in her own voice; she inspected the food racks. The trays were labeled by room numbers, it appeared, not names.

"Here," he said, handing her a tray. "I believe this is for you."

He turned to take his own tray. She glanced at hers. Applesauce with cinnamon in a little plastic cup. A plate with blueberry pancakes, what looked like fresh peach slices, and a tiny container of syrup. A large plastic cup of orange juice with bits of pulp and two seeds swirling on top. An equally large hard pink plastic mug of coffee, still steaming. And no milk. Except for no milk, this wasn't what she'd chosen from the menu she'd filled out the day before. Smiling, she gave silent thanks for the mistake. They walked together back to the couch. Sitting, she glanced at his tray, which held hot water and dry, dark toast.

"You don't eat much?" Reilly asked.

"Don't need to," he replied quietly, "but *you* do, so eat. There's plenty of time for questions later."

She tasted the applesauce, then the pancakes. Halfway through, she suddenly stopped. Her *plan*, she wasn't following her plan. She never ate the first few days—this could ruin her credibility. She looked hesitantly at the peaches and the juice, her hair tumbling forward over her shoulders.

"It's OK, eat," he insisted again, smiling.

She laughed and ate. The ache deep in her belly was being replaced with warmth, spreading up into her chest, diffusing down her arms into her fingertips. Even her toes felt warm.

"Good?" he asked, wiping toast crumbs from his fingers.

"Yes, actually." She wanted to say, wonderful. She wanted to tell him that the cold—like frozen steel—that had settled in her bones years ago was actually easing a bit. "I always liked applesauce," she added.

"You'd better hurry," Judas said, rising from the couch, "it's almost time for group." She watched him walk round the couch, and replace his tray. She got up off the couch to return her own tray, which now held only empty plastic containers. When she turned around, he was gone, and the room was almost empty. He must have gone back to his room, she thought. Only two patients were left, sitting side by side, their backs to the garden windows. They smiled at her, so she turned and walked back to the corridor to her room.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As she reached her door, she noticed the towel draped over the top of it. It had been there when she arrived. She'd taken it down almost immediately. Not ten minutes later, the admitting nurse had charged into her room and replaced it, folding it precisely in thirds and placing it over the top of the door, so that equal parts draped inside and out. She was told that with the towel in place, they could check on her at night without waking her. For two nights now, every fifteen minutes, someone pushed open her door, and a light that must have been cannibalized from an old lighthouse poured its glare over her face, just long enough to make sure she was still breathing, but more than long enough to wake her. She felt like a deer caught in headlights, over and over again. She reassured herself that it didn't matter, because anoxic brain death could be accomplished in six minutes, in plenty of time between the checks, if her need became overwhelming again. *That* would show them, all right. She again removed the towel. She would dress or undress behind a closed door. She wondered what behavior modification was necessary to ensure privacy, or at least an uninterrupted night's sleep . . . *if* she could ever get to sleep.

She let the robe slip off and down to the floor, kicking it into the corner. Crossing into the bathroom, she dumped her nightshirt on the floor as well and started the shower, slipping under the stream of hot water. At least they've got decent water pressure here, she thought, enjoying the hard jets of water hitting her upper back, then falling forward over her breasts and down her thighs. Her fingers moved quickly and easily through her hair, helping to rinse the lathered suds. She stopped suddenly as she realized that the tangles were gone. How the hell did he manage *that?* He must have had a comb, he *had* to have had one. But all she could remember were his soothing fingers, moving effortlessly through her hair. Her eyes beginning to burn, she turned her face into the water. Soaped, rinsed, and with hair squeaking clean, she let the water run.

She heard the bell in the distance.

"Great," she muttered, "I can't even shower in peace." But the usual surge of anger didn't quite follow. Turning off the water, she reached for the towel, dried herself, and then wrapped the damp towel around her head, rolling it like a turban. When she was young, she'd done the same thing, pretending she was a princess in a faraway exotic kingdom. Smiling at the thought, she pulled her jeans from the closet. Blue jeans and a T-shirt, her summer uniform. In winter, she'd substitute a black turtleneck, maybe a black sweater. Dressed, she loosened the towel and let her hair fall back, wetting her T-shirt. The comb slipped easily through it, separating and smoothing the deep red strands. The bell sounded once again. Rule number two, she thought, pay attention to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bells, and you won't be late for meetings. First a ten minute warning, then two minutes. No time to dry her hair; she opened her door and replaced the towel, adjusting the edges unevenly.

Other doors were opening in her corridor, as the other patients began to congregate for the first formal group of the day. Reilly tried to concentrate on the cool dampness of the back of her shirt, rather than on her rapidly increasing pulse rate. Despite yesterday's bizarrely diverting events during group, she wasn't the least bit eager to go. Reilly truly loathed group therapy. The interminable repetitive introductions. The inevitable comments about her name. And then, the worst part—everyone droning on and on and on about *other* people's passions and troubles and dreams.

Passing the nurses' station, she thought maybe she'd try just not going, claim a headache, maybe. Turning back toward her room, she almost collided with Nurse Connell.

"I was just coming to get you. I was afraid you'd try to stay away again today. They told me they had to practically drag you yesterday. The doctor left orders that you *had* to attend today, no excuse would be accepted. Group's in the big room," Connell said, moving out from behind the counter. "Let me show you, Reilly," she added, taking Reilly's left elbow in her hand, urging her around, back toward the offices.

Reilly jerked her arm back to her side. "I remember where it is and I can manage just fine, thanks," she spat back. "And it's Ms. Grant to *you*."

"We try not to be so formal around here, Reilly," Connell responded, with deliberate calm. "We find it provides a better atmosphere to use first names. It inspires trust, and sharing—don't you think?"

Reilly turned and faced the nurse. "So why do you get name tags with *last* names, then?"

"Why, because *we're* the staff, of course. Now, don't be silly. Go on in and take a seat. They're waiting for you now."

Reilly looked past the door, into the large white room. Just like yesterday, it was filled with chairs that were filled with people, looked to be about a dozen of them. The formation was more of an ellipse than the usual circle. Everyone was quiet, staring at her. She stared back, immobile. She felt a hard push from behind, forcing her to step forward.

"Go *on*, go," Connell whispered loudly from behind her. She didn't turn to look, but walked to the last remaining empty chair and plopped down on it, eyes on her feet. At least it was next to Judas, and not the doctor, she thought gratefully.

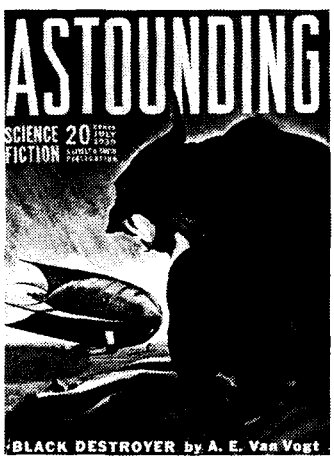
"Well, now that we're all here, let's get started, before we waste any *more* valuable time."

Reilly knew the reprimand was aimed directly at her, but refused to look up and acknowledge the speaker. Her quick glance around the room

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A TREASURE FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF SCIENCE FICTION!

A Hardbound Copy of the July 1939 Edition of ASTOUNDING!



Critics mark this issue as the first "great" issue edited by John W. Campbell, Jr. It contains the first published story, "Black Destroyer," by A.E. van Vogt and the first story by Isaac Asimov to be published in **ASTOUNDING.**

This hardbound facsimile of the July 1939 issue also contains an Epilogue in which A.E. van Vogt, Asimov, and Rocklynne comment on their own work, their feelings towards **ASTOUNDING**, and especially their relationships with John W. Campbell, Jr.

This classic collector's item is now only **$9.95** but act fast, supply is limited. Please send my 1939 **ASTOUNDING** to:

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Send check or money order (No COD's) to: Analog, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462
Canadian or **Foreign** orders add **$5.00.** Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. MRIA-0

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a minute earlier had been long enough to catch just which chair held the doctor. He was obvious, but different from yesterday's. White coats or no white coats, you could always tell the doctors.

"As it's my first meeting with you, we'll go over some rules briefly, now that you've bothered to join us, Reilly," said the doctor. "Look at me when I speak, please."

It had to be the doctor, they always spoke first. Besides, no one else would make her look at them just because they were speaking to her.

She looked up slowly.

"That's better, thank you, Reilly." The words squeaked from a bearded face, of indeterminate youth and determinate inexperience. He had an enormous paunch, hanging down and out over a too-tight belt. His brown sports jacket couldn't possibly button, and the blue jeans hadn't seen the inside of a washing machine for several weeks. A skinny black tie was strangling his neck.

"I'm Dr. Hayword," he said. "As some of you may know, I'll be replacing Dr. Avery for the rest of the week. He's been called away suddenly. I want you all to introduce yourselves, starting here on my right. And after that, everyone will just speak their minds. Don't interrupt another speaker, and always state your name before you speak. Any questions about the rules, before we start?"

Silence echoed through the room. Dr. Hayword turned to the patient at his right. "Okay, Linda, isn't it?" he asked, consulting a list balanced precariously on his knee. "Why don't you start. Tell us who you are, and why you're here."

"I don't want to go first, I always have to go first," the emaciated woman whined, swinging her feet rapidly back and forth, scraping the floor tiles at each pass.

"You're on my right, you go first," the doctor insisted, spraying saliva a solid three feet.

She wiped her face with both hands, accompanied by several giggles and snorts from those outside the three-foot radius. "Great. Fine. Linda Dumond. Anorexia. Next, please," she begged.

Reilly turned to her left. "Is this guy for real?" she whispered.

The strange gray eyes caught hers once again. "Shh, if you hear their names, you might remember them," he answered.

Her cheeks flushed, her gaze plunged back to her feet. She could barely hear the brief introductions, the distant grunting and mumbling playing backup to her pounding pulse. So much for Judas being on my side, she thought. Looking up, Reilly found that everyone was staring at her once again.

"Reilly, we're waiting," said the doctor. "That *is* your name, isn't it? It's certainly unusual enough."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, that's my name, Reilly, Reilly Grant," she answered slowly. She paused and took a slow, deep breath. It looked as though she'd missed at least four introductions. So what else was new?

"And no, it's not that unusual," she continued, with a defiant toss of her almost-dry hair. "It was my mother's name, and her mother's name, and *her* mother's name."

"And what brought you here?"

"An ambulance."

"Excuse me?"

"An ambulance brought me here, well *there*, to the state hospital, I mean. A couple of weeks ago. But I was transferred here by ambulance too."

"There's no need to be snide," the doctor said frostily. "Just *why* did you need an ambulance? The first time, that is?"

Reilly unconsciously slid her hands past each other, palms together, grasping her wrists. She remained silent.

"Reilly, why did you need an ambulance?" the doctor repeated.

"I tried to cut myself," she answered, glaring back at him.

"You tried to commit suicide? How, by slashing your wrists?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," she said. She hadn't gotten to the actual slashing this time. There was only a token struggle, as they whisked her away, sirens and all. It had been easier just to go, than to face the mess, the broken glassware and equipment, the techs in the lab. Not that she'd had much choice about it. They had looked so *scared*, Russ and Judy! It must have been all the blood from the mice. She remembered breaking everything that would shatter, but saving the blender. She was homogenizing the mice in it when Russ and Judy came in, scooping up the ones she could catch and dropping them in, one by one. But every time she opened the top, blood and little bits of pulverized mouse would spurt out, mostly blood. Some splatters even reached the ceiling and dripped back down. It was making such a slippery mess on the countertop, even the mice were slipping and sliding. She thought they looked as if they were dancing. But it slowed them down and made them easier to catch. Reilly hadn't heard the techs at first, probably because of the blender, she'd decided later. They'd just stood in the doorway and stared, then Russ had started to cry. That was when she'd picked up the scalpel. Reilly figured that Judy must have thought that *they* were next, judging from how fast she'd bolted, pulling Russ with her. Not five minutes later, campus security burst in. She didn't really fight much, but one of the guards left nursing a long gash in his thigh, having slipped and landed on one of the larger shards of broken glassware littering the floor. His language had been spectacular. All in all, hadn't done much for her reputation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reilly stayed silent for another minute, trying to get it all into words.

"Fine," he said, interrupting her long silence, shifting in his chair. "Next?"

Stunned, she swallowed hard, glaring at the doctor, who was now staring at *his* feet. That was *it?* she thought, "Fine," and then on to the next patient? Just when she might actually have *said* something?

"Call me Doc," said Judas. "Because I help people, and besides, you wouldn't be able to pronounce my *real* name anyway. I'm here because of what you used to label a chronic delusional state. I don't know what it's called in the new DSM book," he said apologetically.

"I don't quite understand," said Dr. Hayword, rustling rapidly through his notes, looking quite lost. "I thought that you wanted to be called Judas?"

"That was *yesterday*," Doc said, smiling cheerfully. "I've changed since then, I'm someone else now."

"Ah . . ." Dr. Hayword said helplessly.

"You see, I kept changing, and I kept getting arrested," Doc explained. "I guess the judge finally got tired of seeing me in court, so I was ordered away for observation. At any rate, someone somewhere along the line signed a paper claiming I was a danger to myself and to society, and well . . . here I've been ever since," he concluded, smiling benignly.

"And you're delusional, you say?" asked Doctor Hayword.

"No, that's what *you* folks say," he answered. "Actually, I'm an extra-terrestrial, an alien, a being from another planet, whatever. And I'm here to *help* you," he repeated.

Reilly jerked her gaze from the doctor to Judas, anger and frustration melting into confusion.

Dr. Hayword was trying unsuccessfully to suppress his nervous giggles. Reilly was sure his discomfort had to be obvious to everyone.

"I see," the doctor said. "From which, ah, other planet are you from, if I may ask?" he asked, as if it really mattered.

"Sure, you can ask. But you don't know it. It's in a system just out beyond what you call Tau Ceti."

"And just how did you get here?"

"The usual way. By starship, but it's really not important. Can we move on to the next patient now? I've really had more than my share of time."

The room was overflowing with embarrassed giggles, as Dr. Hayword leaned back in his chair.

"Quiet, please. Okay, ah, 'Doc,' . . . if that's what you want to be called from now on. We'll move on." He looked to the next patient. "Next."

Reilly didn't hear the rest of the introductions. She hadn't been laughing with the others. She'd been watching, wondering. She'd known plenty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of deluded patients, and doctors, for that matter. She'd had a few hefty delusions herself. This just wasn't right. He looked all right, even if he did pay too much attention to the others. Standard khaki pants and a pale pink shirt, brown socks, and old loafers. Normal clothes, just like yesterday. Reilly had guessed he was about thirty, maybe a bit older. He sure didn't look like any alien she'd ever dreamed about. But then, he didn't look like *Judas* either, at least not like any pictures of Judas she'd ever seen. Not like in the Bible books for children she'd read years ago in the pediatrician's offices, or even like in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Except maybe for the eyes. She'd never seen eyes that peculiar, beautiful gray, like the mother-of-pearl lining in the broken shells she'd found in the sand years ago. Then again, he didn't look like a *patient* either. She'd always thought it took one to know one, but maybe not.

He looked too happy, serene even, she thought, still watching him as he turned toward her. Reilly felt herself blushing again, the heat storming into her cheeks. She hated being caught looking, but continued watching him as he turned back to the doctor.

"I'd love to hear more from Ms. Grant, Doctor," he said. "Except for you, she is the newest here and we'd all like to know more about her." Assenting murmurs from around the room assaulted her. Reilly wondered if this was how the gladiators felt.

"Okay, group. Let's have Reilly tell us a bit more about herself," the doctor said, nodding in agreement, but not looking at all relieved, glancing down again at the notes in his hands.

Reilly gulped. "No, really, that's okay," she stammered. "Couldn't we just finish the other introductions? I don't need to talk, really."

"Don't be scared, we're all friends here," the doctor insisted, ignoring her question.

"I really *can't*," she pleaded. "Not today." Finding no leniency in the doctor's face but only something that for all the world looked like terror, she fixated once again on her feet. Feeling a gentle touch on her shoulder, she looked up. Again the gray eyes.

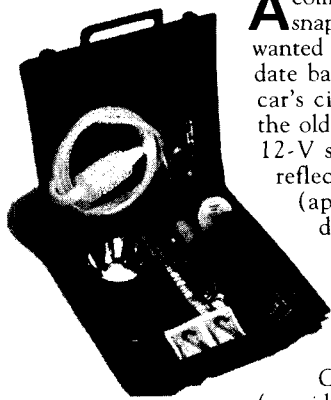
"What do you do . . . on the outside, I mean?" Doc asked softly.

"I'm a student. I *was* a student, I should say. I think I got expelled this last time. This was my second year in the lab, in grad school—in the biochemistry department. I've been working on amyloidosis, its pathogenesis mostly. My advisor, he said he wouldn't tolerate another interruption in the project. My accidents—that's what he called them, my accidents—were getting too embarrassing for the others. Not to mention too expensive. He said that he'd get someone else, someone else with a sense of committment. He *meant* someone who wasn't *nuts*, I just know he did. I've *always* been committed to my work, always. But that's what he said the last time, after I got out. He'd *do* it too, the son of a bitch—kick

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ORDER MALL

FOR ROADSIDE PROBLEMS



A compact carrying case of polyethylene with snap lock comes complete with the most-wanted emergency aids. It includes, an up-to-date battery charger that plugs into another car's cigarette lighter-easier and safer than the old jump start cables. There's a powerful 12-V spotlight with lighter plug and red reflector, plus two 15-minute safety flares (approved in 50 states)-plus a 24" sq. distress flag. Also a tank-to-tank gas siphon pump, a 6-qt. bag for carrying water, a roll of plastic tape for emergency repair of hoses and wiring, a coil of wire and 4 elastic trunk tie-downs complete the kit. Clean up with a moist towelette (provided) and you're on your way 11 3/4" sq.
$24.98 (S5.50)#A1826X

NIGHT TRACKER

Light up your night! Night Tracker, the cordless, rechargeable hand-held spotlight packs a 500,000 candlepower beam to give you light whenever, wherever you need it. The beam is 10 times brighter than your automobile headlights and will carry over 1 mile. Operates on recharge-able batteries. Recharge it from 110 volt AC outlet or from any 12 volt car or boat outlet. Perfect for home, travel, boating and camping. Made in the USA and comes with a 90 day warranty. Now includes an amber and red lens attachments.
$79.98 (S6.50) #A1975

To order by mail send check or credit card number and expiration date **to**: **MAIL ORDER MALL,**
CALL TOLL FREE 24 HOURS A DAY **1-800-722-9999** **Dept.** 023 AS
MASTERCARD/VISA AMERICAN EXPRESS **PO Box 3006,**
30 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE•For Exchange or Refund **Lakewood, NJ 08701**
For each item add shipping and handling charge shown ( ) to arrive at total price. NJ residents add 7% sales tax.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ORDER MALL

TUNE IN WITH TRAVELLER II

People on the go need to have the world at their fingertips and with the Traveller II by Grundig you can tune in to a world of information and entertainment—wherever you are. This sleek innovative radio offers you a choice of 5 shortwave frequencies plus FM and AM reception with a sophisticated 2 inch speaker and telescopic antenna. It features an easy to read multifunction display with precision tuning. The Traveller II's alarm lets you choose the radio alarm or the gentle Humane Wake System (HMS) which features a gradual increase in volume. The display clock offers home time and world time that is easily selected from a concealed world time select switch. Only the innovative electronic technology of Grundig could offer you all this in an incredibly compact unit (5 1/2" x 3 1/2" x 1 1/4"). Comes with plug in earphones for private listening and a sleek black carrying case. Requires 3 AA (batteries included) and offers one year warranty. So wherever your travels take you —the Traveller II is the portable shortwave world time radio that makes the perfect travel companion. $99.00 (S8.50) #A2023

FAN-TASTIC

All fans circulate air, but this is the only fan that circulates air in all directions at once. Wall to wall, floor to ceiling. As the fan operates a unique rotating grill directs the air flow through a 360° sweep, so it is not blasting out in a single current. Pushbutton controls turn grill rotation on/off, select among three fan speeds. This is a year-round fan, ideal for keeping heat off the ceiling in winter, moving cool air off the floor in summer. Measures 16"x18 1/2"x7" slim (12" fan diameter), weighs only 8 lbs. for easy portability. Quiet operation, UL listed, one year limited warranty, costs only $49.98 (S7.95) #A1868

To order by mail send check or credit card number and expiration date **to: MAIL ORDER MALL,**
CALL TOLL FREE 24 HOURS A DAY **1-800-722-9999** **Dept.** 023 AS
MASTERCARD/VISA AMERICAN EXPRESS **PO Box 3006,**
30 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE • For Exchange or Refund **Lakewood, NJ 08701**
For each item add shipping and handling charge shown ( ) to arrive at total price. NJ residents add 7% sales tax.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me out, I mean. Especially after this last time." Astonished, Reilly stopped abruptly. She couldn't have said all that. It was all true, but she never would have *said* it. Not to strangers, not to *anybody*.

"I don't think your studies should be your major priority right now, Reilly," said Dr. Hayword, stroking his tie rapidly, rhythmically. "Don't you think your time here would be better spent dealing with more important issues?"

"My career isn't important?" she shot back. "I'm twenty-five years old, I don't have any parents, I don't have any children, and I've only got *me* to take care of me. So just what issues are so much more important? Tell me, I'd really like to know."

"No need to raise your voice, Reilly, just calm down," the doctor said, blinking rapidly. He paused, checking his watch.

"I think this brings us just about to the end of our time together this morning." Struggling a bit, he added, "I realize that these sessions normally go for an hour or so, but since I'm really just substituting, I think we might as well end a bit early. You all did very well, and we'll take some of these issues up again tomorrow, if we have the time." Perspiration beading on his upper lip, he wiggled forward in his chair. Perched on the edge, he had to pause to catch his breath before lurching out of the chair to leave the room.

Jesus Christ, she thought, joining the rush to leave the room. So even when you *do* tell them your problems, they tell you you're wrong. Can't win for losing. I can see I'm not going to last long around here.

Again, a gentle touch to her shoulder.

"I'd love a chance to hear about your work. We've got almost an hour before your private session, so how about joining me for a cup of coffee? Or some tea, I've got some jasmine tea in my room if you'd care for some," suggested the alien with the beautiful eyes, the guy from out past Tau Ceti. That's how she'd think of him now—not as Judas, but as some mysterious alien from some bizarre avant-garde off-off Broadway musical.

"I could sure use something to drink after that debacle. Tea sounds fine, but what about your friend Pancho?" Reilly asked. "Where *is* he anyway? I haven't seen him all morning." She suddenly realized that Pancho hadn't been present at group as she'd expected he'd be.

"Pancho?"

"Yeah, you remember, Pancho. The guy who wanted your thirty pieces of silver in group yesterday," Reilly explained. "Well, *one* of the people who wanted your silver. You remember, the young guy you were talking to yesterday afternoon in the lounge, over in the corner. When you were Judas."

"Oh, yes, Pancho. You have to forgive me. I have some trouble carrying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over from one delusion, as it were, to another. He left, yesterday late, I believe. Come, let's go to my room and I'll fix some tea, and you'll tell me about your work."

Reilly walked quietly with him down the short corridor. She broke the silence just as they reached his room.

"He left? You don't just *leave*. I may not know a lot about this particular institution, but this I know. You don't just leave a place like this. Not unless—"

"Sure you do," Doc interrupted, drawing her gently into the room. "If you're *ready*, that is. I'm not sure yet with Pancho. He had a pass, overnight. He should be back. After lunch, I think.

"So what do you think of my humble abode?" he asked, gracefully gesturing with both arms, as if parting a large, heavy curtain to allow her a clearer view.

"Nice," she said, not actually noticing, still dwelling on Pancho's inexplicable absence.

"Nice? That's all you can say, *nice?*" Doc asked, looking mildly offended as he filled two sunshine yellow porcelain cups with water from a pitcher resting precariously on the edge of a small, intricately carved chest.

Partly out of courtesy, and the rest out of embarrassment, Reilly looked slowly around the room. She realized she should have been overwhelmed when she'd first entered. Green velvet curtains draped the single window, through which streamed the mid-morning light. Several trunks, some wooden with old metal fittings and some smaller ones made all of metal, were piled neatly in one corner, towering over the carved chest, sitting squarely under the window. The bed wasn't hospital-issue either, but an old three-quarters bed, like her grandmother had had, with four posts, each carved into rose vines climbing a slender lattice. A white quilt, embroidered in geometric green cross-stitching, covered the bed. There were wicker baskets and clay pots on a single long shelf high up on the far wall, each just touching the one next to it, all filled, some with dried reeds, others with small branches or dried flowers, mostly muted blue and lavender, none of which Reilly recognized. Below this shelf were books, stacks of neatly piled books, hundreds and hundreds of them, big hardcover ones on the bottom, smaller ones stacked on these, and paperbacks on top. The bindings were all placed outward, so you could tell which book was which, without having to twist your head, or the book.

"Yeah, nice, real nice. Outstanding, actually," Reilly answered, completing her survey. There was a single picture in the room, centered over the bed. It was quite large, almost three feet wide, and almost as high, and set in an ornate gilded frame. It depicted an alien world, a craggy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

uninhabited landscape in purple and green, lit with three moons. As Reilly drew closer, she realized it was a painting, not a print.

"Is that home?" she asked.

"Excuse me?"

"The painting," Reilly said. "I was asking about the painting."

"Oh, it's an astronomical," he replied, crossing to her, handing her a steaming cup.

As if that explains it, she thought, taking the tea cup in both hands.

"I'm sorry I don't have any saucers for the cups," he said, as he crossed back to the chest. He removed the other cup from a very tiny and very illegal microwave oven tucked behind the pitcher on the chest.

"I took the liberty of adding just a bit of sugar, to heighten the jasmine," he added. "I hope you like it."

"All this, and a microwave too?" Reilly blurted out, from somewhere beyond amazement.

"The microwave? It was a present, actually, from one of the doctors. I guess that's why they let me keep it."

"You're kidding."

"Nope. Besides, I've been here a long time, a *real* long time. And they're not all bad, you know—the doctors, I mean. Some of them are actually halfway decent. The nurses too, once you get to working with them a bit."

"*Working* with them?"

"You know, talking to them, working on your problems, that sort of thing. One can develop some interesting relationships around here. Some of the staff's got real potential. You'll see."

"Well, everyone's entitled to their own opinion. You'll forgive me if I don't agree."

"Absolutely. Would you hold this for a second?" he asked, as he handed her his cup, crossing to the corner of the room. Reilly watched as he pulled down two identical small brass trunks from the top of the corner pile.

"Seats," he explained, placing them side by side at the foot of the bed. "Please, let's sit down," he said, patting the top of the trunk nearest Reilly.

Handing him back his tea, she sat, as did he.

"Comfortable?" he inquired, after taking a sip.

"Yeah," she said quickly, surprised at the truth.

"Try the tea," he suggested.

"I was actually just enjoying the smell," Reilly said. She'd never had jasmine tea, she'd only read about it. "It smells like flowers, sweet flowers," she said, suddenly feeling awkward. She took a sip. It *tasted* like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

flowers, warm and sweet. The tension eased as she continued to drink. She looked up, and saw him smiling.

"So," he said, "tell me about your work."

"My work?"

"Yeah," he said, with an encouraging smile. "Your work. You said in group you were working on amyloidosis."

"You've heard of it?" she asked, astonished. She'd never met anyone outside of medicine or her department who had ever heard of amyloid.

"I've heard of amyloid, but I really can't say I know much about it," he admitted. "It's a protein deposition problem, isn't it?"

"More or less," she conceded, mystified at even this degree of understanding.

"Go on, please. I really would like to hear more."

"Well," she started uncertainly, "you want the whole lecture, or just the highlights?"

"Pretend I know nothing, and start from there."

"Okay, but if you know any of this, you stop me, okay?"

"Sure. Please, tell me all about amyloidosis." He settled back comfortably to listen.

"Well, you know about amyloid, right? Some proteins in the body, under certain circumstances, will aggregate together instead of staying as isolated molecular structures. Some proteins, but not all. When they do aggregate together, they form actual fibrils. That's the amyloid, that's what those protein fibrils are called. These amyloid protein fibrils can then infiltrate the heart, the lungs, the liver—well, any or all vital organs, actually. Their presence will, for example, make the heart a lot stiffer, so it can't pump properly, so that heart failure develops. Or in the kidneys, the amyloid fibrils infiltrate the tissue and more or less clog up the filtration system, and so eventually the kidneys stop working. When this kind of organ involvement is seen clinically, the disease is called amyloidosis." She stopped, not sure that he was following her.

"So the amyloid deposits eventually compromise organ function and result in death?"

"I couldn't have said it better myself," agreed Reilly.

"And just what got you interested in such an esoteric, rare disease?"

"It's not all that rare," she snapped. "And there are all different *kinds* of amyloid anyway, it's not just one disease."

"I wasn't criticizing your choice, I'm just curious what prompted it," he replied gently.

She hesitated for a moment, and then said, "My mother."

"Yes?"

"My mother, *she* had it. Hereditary amyloid, not one of the usual kinds. She died eleven years ago. It took a couple of years for somebody to make

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the diagnosis, and they only figured out it was one of the rare inherited forms about a year before she died. It must have come from her father, they figured, because he'd died in a plane crash before she'd even been born, before he would have had any symptoms himself." Picking at the frayed seam of her jeans, she looked up at him.

"I've got the same gene," she said quietly. "Shall we say that I'm not exactly looking forward to the same fate, as inevitable as it may be?"

"You've got a pre-albumin mutation?" he asked. "The methionine for valine substitution at position 83?"

"How do you know about *that?*" she asked, staring, almost dropping her cup in surprise, spilling a bit on her lap.

"I read a lot," he answered, with just a trace of a smile as she glanced at the wall of books behind him. "But tell me more—about your work, I mean."

"Well," she started, rubbing the spot the tea left on her jeans, "I've been focusing on the pathogenesis, what conditions are necessary for the amyloid fibril formation; you know, trying to figure out what causes the various proteins to conglomerate into the infiltrating fibrils. I've mostly been working with the mouse model, with some new modifications." Reilly had to pause to catch her breath. "I know it's a long step from the animal model to human," she rushed on, "but if we could figure out what it is that *starts* the process of fibril formation, maybe we could modulate it somehow, and slow down the process. If we could just keep the fibrils from forming or precipitating in the heart and kidneys—"

"You'd live a lot longer," he interrupted.

"I wouldn't *mind* seeing forty, with my body more or less intact," Reilly said, trying to ignore the impulse to cover her scarred wrists. "Doesn't make sense, does it?"

"What, that you keep trying to kill yourself so that you won't die from the amyloid?" he asked, probing. "Is *that* why you think you do it? And all the other things? I wondered about that myself, at first."

"There's just too much pain sometimes. I know that sounds too simple; I know it can't *be* that simple. I don't think I was expecting it this time. I really thought things would be better, you know, when I got into the lab. I thought if I wasn't just in class, but actually working, I'd have more control. But it was the same, maybe even worse this time. I get so mad sometimes, so angry, there's nothing else I can *do*. I smash things, sometimes I hurt people. Sometimes I hurt *me*, if I can control it . . . but after a point, I just can't control it. But if I stay locked up for a while, and don't eat, and all that other stuff depressed people are supposed to do, then it eases up. When I know it's safe, I start acting 'improved,' and they let me back out. I can't explain it any better than that."

"And you don't know *why?*"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sometimes I think it must be because of my mother . . . because it was so awful for her. And I know it's *exactly* what's going to happen to *me*. At first it wasn't too bad, when she'd just lost all the feeling in her hands and feet from the nerve involvement. I was about three years old then. But then my dad left, he just couldn't take it, I guess. I don't know. And then her kidneys went and she had to go on dialysis, and then finally she couldn't breathe because of the heart failure, and even when she *could* breathe, she couldn't *move*, because of the arthritis—maybe I'm just scared, I don't know."

He reached and gently wiped away the tears as they eased down her cheeks. "How about letting me fix it?" he asked.

"What do you mean, *fix* it?"

"Fix it, repair it," he said. "Make the anger, the pain go away."

"You may be a great hairdresser," she said sarcastically, swiping at her eyes, "but I think this is a bit out of your league, don't you?"

"It's precisely in my league," he insisted. "It's what I *do*, it's why I'm here." He smiled. "Think about it, the offer stays open indefinitely." He started to rise. "Your tea's almost gone, let me make you some more."

"No, please, don't bother," Reilly said, almost composed, as she got to her feet. "It's got to be about time for my private session, for whatever that's worth," she mumbled. "I have to go, really. Thanks for the tea. And, well, I'll see you later, I guess." She handed him her cup.

"My pleasure," Doc said. "But *think* about it, will you?"

"About what?"

"Letting me fix it," he repeated.

"Oh, yeah, sure," she said, backing out the door.

"Be careful," he said quickly. "Watch out, Pancho's coming in right behind you there."

Reilly spun around, narrowly missing the young man.

"Oh, hi," Pancho said with a smile. "Don't leave on my account, please. I'm early anyway."

"That's okay, I really have to go." She ducked out the door.

Pancho actually *smiled*, she thought, walking quickly down the hall. Nicely, even. She'd run into other ones, just like Pancho. They *never* smiled nicely. But then, they never got overnight passes, *either*, she thought, reaching the lounge.

Once again, Nurse Connell was laying in wait for her.

"I was just trying to find you, Reilly," she said loudly from the station counter. "Come on over here."

The nurse was just like a spider Reilly thought, as she walked slowly past the tiled lounge to the counter, and this place was one giant web, filled with flies and ants and other crawling things for her to catch and drain dry of life.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Your private session, Reilly, you're almost late. Didn't you hear the bells?"

Reilly hadn't, but answered caustically, "So, I'm not late, am I? Besides, you'll bitch either way."

"We don't use words like that around here, Reilly. No name-calling please."

"I wasn't calling *you* anything," Reilly sneered. "Don't you know the difference between a noun and a verb when you hear it, nurse?"

"Just go to the office and wait for Dr. Hayword, if you please. The small one on the left," she added, pointing down the short hallway.

Reilly didn't bother to answer back, but walked the few short steps past the group room to the designated office. The little ones were all pretty much the same, hideous tiny white boxes. This one had two chairs, both high-backed solid wooden chairs, like back in grade school, the ones the teachers had. There was also a lone low table, separate from the chairs. It could have been the same room she waited in her first day, but she wasn't quite sure. Hearing footsteps approaching, she dropped quickly into the chair facing the door. Let the doctor have *his* back exposed, she thought.

"Well, Reilly," Dr. Hayword said, entering the room, "let's get down to business, shall we?" He wasn't wearing the jacket anymore, just a polyester white shirt with large circles of sweat outlining his armpits. The tie was just as tight.

"Then how about taking a seat," Reilly suggested. She hated it when they stood.

"Don't worry, my dear," he said. "I'm just checking my notes." He was fussing with one of several charts that seemed constantly ready to spill from his hands. He looked at the empty chair and frowned, then sat down.

Simultaneously, Reilly propped both her feet on the low table, effectively eliminating it for any other use, extending the role reversal just a bit. The doctor looked at her feet, then at his charts, and then held the charts clumsily on his knees.

"I'm not your dear," she said.

"I beg your pardon?" he said, looking up.

"I'm not your dear. You don't have my permission to address me that way."

"I'm sorry," he said nervously, "you're quite right. What would you like to be called?"

"Ms. Grant to you," she replied, staring at him.

"Well, Ms. Grant, you've quite some record here," he said, indicating the top chart.

"What, you want me to be proud of it or something?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now, you *know* that's not what I meant. I counted seventeen admissions to at least five different facilities over the last nine years. And the pattern, I don't like the pattern," he said, shaking his head, as though she were some school child caught in another lie.

"Now I have to worry because you don't like the pattern of my hospitalization?"

"We're not going to get anywhere with this attitude of yours," he said, still scowling. "Let's move on then. About your meds. We need to adjust your meds."

"Wrong. Try actually *reading* the charts. I don't do meds."

"I'm sure we can find something to help you, Reilly—Ms. Grant, I mean. You can't possibly have tried them all. Try to remember: *we're* the doctors. We want to help you, but you must at least let us try." He was actually pleading.

"Read the charts," she repeated. "Until then, I've got nothing more to say." She folded one arm over the other, grasping her elbows, and stared at him.

"Well, then," he went on, his voice quavering. "Why don't you tell me just a bit about yourself, then? How you're feeling . . . you know." He stopped in mid sentence as he caught her silent stare.

"Well, actually, maybe you're right. I *could* use a bit more time to review some records," he said quickly, the words tumbling out of his mouth. "Shall we say, we'll try again later this afternoon? Check at the nurses' station after lunch." He left without waiting for a reply.

Reilly managed to slow her breathing, concentrating on each inspiration, prolonging each expiration rhythmically. One of these days, she thought, *one* of these days, not daring to complete the sentence even in her own mind. She removed her feet slowly from the table, and sat, head in hands, for a moment. Before she could cry, she got up and headed back to her room.

As she rounded the corner at the nurses' station, she saw Pancho at one end of the long counter. He was signing papers with Connell. So, she thought, he really *is* getting out! He isn't even staying for lunch, she thought, and realized suddenly she'd been hoping to see him then, maybe even ask him about Judas.

"Reilly, wait a minute, please."

She turned to the now familiar voice.

"Are you busy right now?" asked Doc, from the couch where they'd had breakfast.

"I was just on my way to my room to rest," Reilly protested, taking a last look at Pancho, who was still talking with the nurse.

"Could I entice you into joining me for another cup of tea? Or something cold, perhaps?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Do you always invite a person for a drink, every time you meet them? Is this some alien custom I need to know about?"

"Well, you must admit, it's a lot more inviting than hiding in your room alone. Seriously, what can I get you to drink?"

"I don't know, what do *aliens* drink?"

"We were talking about what *you* wanted," he said, smiling. "Don't change the subject."

"Lemonade—that's what I want, lemonade."

"I think I can manage that," he said, rising from the couch. "I'll be just a minute. Why don't you find us a place outside," he suggested, pointing across the lounge to the garden beyond the windows.

Reilly threaded her way through the sofas and plastic chairs, which were once again almost fully occupied. The room was rapidly filling with cigarette smoke. Rule number three prohibited smoking during meals and meetings, so those who wanted to smoke were doing so with a vengeance now. Reilly held her breath as she passed through the acrid blue-gray swirls. She reached the sliding glass door, having successfully avoided eye contact with anyone. Doc she could handle, but not the others, not yet. She didn't want to compare horror stories; she was sick to death of them. Like old ladies on the beaches in Florida comparing operations, patients compared Lithium and Cogentin and Elavil, and who had had how many shock treatments . . . *if* they could remember, that is.

It took several attempts to slide the door open. Sweet, cool air greeted her. Late spring in northern California, enclosed in brick walls. The door closed more easily behind her. The garden, such as it was, was deserted. Halfway around the semi-circular brick path was a large weathered teak bench with a high carved back. Its back to the lounge windows, it was almost completely enclosed by forsythia bushes, which hadn't been trimmed in years. The high brick wall captured it in its spreading shadow. She knew he'd find her, so she sat. There wasn't any other place to sit in the garden, except the bench, unless one ignored the half dozen "don't sit on the grass" signs that peppered the tiny lawn area. There were no flowers, not even a primrose, so ubiquitous everywhere else this time of year. But you could still smell the freshness. She heard the door opening behind her.

"It's Doc, Reilly, you back there?"

"Yeah, on the bench."

"Took me longer than I thought," he said, crossing the lawn quickly. "Here is your lemonade," he said, handing her a large red plastic glass, ice cubes clinking loudly. "Can I sit?"

"Oh, sure," she said, embarrassed to be caught taking up so much space. She slid quickly to one end of the bench.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So, how'd it go? Your session with the new shrink?"

"You don't want to know," she answered, swirling the ice cubes in her glass.

"That grim, was it?"

"Yep, you could say that. It's really not worth talking about. Just the same old story. It's always the same."

"It doesn't have to be, you know," he said.

"Yeah, right, you can *fix it*. So you keep telling me. Look, don't try and do me any favors. I don't take favors. It's easier that way, for me at least. You say you can fix what's stumped all of modern medicine, fine. Great. Thanks, but no thanks."

"Oh, please don't turn me down, not yet. You don't understand. You'd be doing *me* a favor, really."

Reilly looked closely at him. He looked serious; the smile was gone.

"I don't accept favors, and I don't give them. You want to help someone, help Pancho. Give him those thirty pieces of silver . . . that is if you ever *had* any, which I doubt," she said, meeting his eyes.

"I did."

"Excuse me?"

"I did," Doc repeated. "He was kind enough to accept them. That's why he needed the pass. He has an uncle in the rare coin business in San Francisco. He had them appraised last night. He only agreed to keep them if they were real—authentic, I mean. That's what he came back to tell me this morning. If he hadn't used them, I couldn't have made transition. Basically, you might say he was doing me a favor. I was getting real tired of being Judas. He isn't a very popular guy, you know."

"Right. Let me see if I've got this straight. Pancho did you a favor by taking a bunch of genuine two-thousand-year-old coins, so that you could transform yourself, or whatever you call it, from being a famous Biblical traitor to an alien from outer space. Have I got it right?"

"Well, almost," he said.

"There's more?" she asked. She now knew the meaning of incredulous. Maybe that's what being nuts *was*, she wondered. Just too much to believe.

"He gave the coins to his mother. He came back to say thanks, and to tell me he'd given the coins to his mother. Because she loved him anyway. In spite of everything. In spite of what he'd done, what he was."

"He gave them to his *mother?* Give me a break! I can't deal with this. Guys like Pancho don't even *call* their mother on her birthday. They take their mother's last dime; they don't ever *give* them anything but grief."

"Don't you see, that's just *it*. He's *fixed*," said Doc. His smile was tantalizing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Like you want to fix *me*. So I won't hurt anybody any more. So I won't break things, or kill things—"

"Yes," he interrupted. "I can make the pain go away, all of it. Just promise me you'll think about it a little more, before you say no." He began to rise from the bench.

"Don't go," she pleaded, her chest suddenly tightening. "Not yet. After all, I haven't even touched my lemonade."

He sat back down, and she found she could breathe again. She took a sip.

The lemonade was perfect, just a smidgen of sugar. Her mother used to laugh at her love of lemons, claiming she ate them to sweeten her disposition.

"Besides, I *am* thinking, right now, this very minute, I'm thinking about it. I don't suppose you could tell me how you'd set about doing this . . . fixing me, I mean?"

"Sure," he said obligingly. "Let's start with the *real* problem. It's one of your neurotransmitters, your serotonin, that's causing all this grief. It's screwing up the connections, you might say. You're getting incorrect messages."

"You mean in my brain?" she asked.

"Exactly. Aside from your rage, all the anger—you must have had troubles with medication in the past, right?"

"Troubles, yeah, you could say that," she agreed. She'd had convulsions, bone-breaking chills, fevers to 106 degrees, and blistering skin eruptions that had lasted for weeks. It hadn't mattered what anti-depressants and tranquilizers they'd tried in their attempts to keep her out of the hospital, however varied the chemical classes. She'd nearly died after that last attempt; she'd spent more than two weeks in the intensive care unit, and four more on the rehab floor. It was all in her charts, all the gruesome medical details that each new psychiatrist never bothered to read. She'd been left with no alternative but repeated voluntary inpatient observation, with its endless meetings. She wouldn't eat, wouldn't bathe, wouldn't talk for a few days, a few weeks, until the rage would slowly subside and the relentless urge to escape it would pass as well—at least until the next time.

"That's what I thought," he said, seeming to hear her thoughts. "With the 4-hydroxylation instead of the 5, you couldn't *help* but get sick on all that stuff."

"I'm not following you," she said.

"As I said, it's your serotonin." he replied. "Some of it's abnormal."

"It's not *enough*, the amyloid?" she jested grimly. "Now I've got some abnormal neurotransmitter too? And *that's* why I keep winding up in the looney bin? I'm not just terminally messed up because my mother died

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of some disgusting disease that's gonna kill me as well within the next decade, and my father abandoned us in our time of need? You mean that all these shrinks don't really know shit from shinola?"

"That's not exactly how *I* would phrase it, but yeah—it's really more of a problem with some of your serotonin than anything psychological."

"What do you mean, *some* of my serotonin's abnormal? It's either normal or it's *not*." Her voice was shrill.

"If it were *all* abnormal—well, you wouldn't be here," he said calmly. "At first, it just looked to be a gene duplication problem, but then I noticed the mutation *within* the duplication. You've got an extra aberrant enzyme that's hydroxylating tryptophan at the four position instead of the five. So you can wind up producing toxic levels of 4-hydroxytryptophan, which is then converted to the abnormal serotonin. This abnormal enzyme is much more responsive to dietary tryptophan levels than the normal enzyme is. The more tryptophan you get, the higher the level of abnormal serotonin. That's why it all seems to cycle so unpredictably. Didn't you ever wonder why you hated milk so much? It really *was* making you sick. You told me yourself, if you don't eat for a few days, you start to feel better, right? And any drugs affecting neurotransmitters—well, you know full well the disastrous consequences they cause. The balance is just too delicate to tolerate any manipulation. At any rate, the higher the levels . . . well, you know, the more trouble you've got."

"Sounds just dandy, thank you. And just *how* did you come up with that hypothesis?"

"Oh, it's not just a hypothesis. I tested it."

"You tested it? When? How?"

"Your hair. I took the liberty of taking a few strands of your hair this morning, only the loose ones, really. I had them analyzed while I went to make the lemonade. And I confirmed the methionine for valine substitution you were told about. It looks like they were right about your inheriting the amyloid gene. That's what took so long, that and formatting the splicers."

"Took so *long?*" she exclaimed. "I wasn't even waiting five minutes!"

"It helps if you've got the right equipment," he replied with a wide grin. "Besides, it only takes two minutes to make the lemonade."

"You analyzed strands of my hair in three minutes, and with that you were able to figure all that out? Just *who's* the crazy one here? You don't really expect me to *believe* all this?" Reilly laughed. She'd always been able to laugh at the absurd.

"Believing isn't necessary. We're not talking placebo response here. You want me to fix it, I'll fix it. But I'd like to throw in a probe to fix the methionine substitution at the same time, if it's okay with you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A probe?"

"Well, two probes actually, since the problems are unrelated. One to splice out and digest the duplicated DNA sequence, to eliminate the abnormal serotonin production. The other to deal with the amyloid, correcting the code, putting the valine back where it belongs. That's just a simple amino acid replacement. That was the easy part."

"You're not going to let up on this, are you?" Reilly asked.

"Well, it *is* my job—to help, I mean," he laughed, "but I am sorry if I seem too pushy about it. It's just so nice to actually be able to *explain* part of it to someone, and know that they actually understand what I'm saying. That's one of the disadvantages of the spiritual personas I've been using lately, like Judas. They're easy enough to play, but I never get to *explain* any of it. I can only use faith and all those other intangibles to get someone to take me seriously. It's much nicer dealing with someone like *you*, who can face the truth. About me, who I am, what I do, how I do it."

"If all else fails, you try flattery?" she said, trying to smother her own laughter.

"Whatever it takes to get the job done," he grinned. "So, what's it going to be? My offer doesn't expire, but it's almost time for lunch, and I *do* have some things to take care of before then." He paused, arching an eyebrow. "Maybe we can talk about this later on?"

"Oh, what the hell!" she cried, succumbing to the delicious temptation. "Just what do I have to do? Kiss a frog, jump off a cliff in my underwear, don a lamp shade?"

"Heaven forbid!" he said, reaching into his shirt pocket. "Nothing so dramatic. The results will be more than dramatic enough, trust me. Hand me your lemonade."

"Trust you, huh?"

"Yeah, trust me." He smiled.

The glass was still more than half full. Retrieving a small packet from his pocket, he opened the envelope and sprinkled an iridescent powder into the glass. Reilly could see sparkles dancing through the red plastic, and caught a whiff of a light, sweet scent.

"To your health," he said solemnly, handing her back the glass.

"Doesn't it need to be stirred, or something?" she asked, suddenly nervous.

"Nope, it just needs to be drunk."

Honeysuckle—that's what it smells like, she thought. Anything that smells like honeysuckle can't be all bad. She inhaled deeply, bringing the glass to her mouth. Looking straight into his shining gray eyes, she drank.

"Tasted like lemonade," she said, looking at the empty glass.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It *was* lemonade," he said. "I never thought to alter the *taste*."

"Now what?" she asked, feeling slightly giddy.

"Now, you've got lunch to eat and enjoy, and *I've* got work to do," he answered, as he stood up.

"Give me your hand, and we'll go in. Don't worry if you're feeling a little light-headed, it'll pass in just a minute."

"You rearrange my fundamental genetic structure so that not only am I no longer going to be *nuts*, but I'm *not* going to die from a dreadful inherited disorder in the prime of my life—and I'm just going to feel a little *lightheaded?*" she asked, placing her hand once again in his.

"Some people do, but not everyone. Just thought I'd warn you, just in case."

His grip tightened, and Reilly let herself be pulled up from the bench.

"You okay?" he inquired

"Fine," she laughed. "Never got sick on lemonade in my life."

She left her hand in his as they took the short curved brick path back to the lounge door. Stopping in front of the door, she turned to face him, taking his other hand.

"Thanks. Even if you're *not* some alien from out past Tau Ceti—wherever the hell that is, anyway—thanks." She wasn't quite sure what she was thanking him *for*, but she knew it had to be said. That she wanted to say it.

"You're welcome. It was my pleasure," he said, smiling warmly. "And thank *you*, for letting me do my job." He bowed ever so slightly at the waist. Letting go of her hands, he slid the door open and gestured for her to enter.

Reilly stepped into the room, bumping right into Nurse Connell.

"Oops, I was just coming to get you," the nurse said, her eyes twinkling warmly. "I *thought* you two might be out here. Reilly, Dr. Hayword would like to see you again, if you've got a few minutes."

"Right now? He told me maybe sometime after lunch."

"There's no time like the present," Connell smiled. "He's in the office."

Reilly turned and looked at Doc. He smiled, nodding his head in agreement.

"You'll be fine. Don't worry about the doctor. Just consider the meeting a formality. Remember, I can fix *lots* of different things." He looked past her at Connell, winking what Reilly thought just *had* to be a conspiratorial wink.

"Absolutely," the nurse agreed, with a grin. "Speaking of which, there's a new patient I thought you might like to meet. He's just finishing his intake interview, and I told him that you might show him the ropes, as it were. He's real anxious, and I told him that if he talked to you, he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

might start feeling a bit better. If it's all right with you, after I walk Reilly to the office, I'll send him to your room?"

"Sure," said Doc. "Tell him I'll have some coffee waiting for him," he added, moving off towards the hallway.

The two women walked silently to the office. As they approached the open door, Connell touched Reilly lightly on the shoulder.

"Stop and see me at the station after you finish with the doctor, and we can get started on your paperwork," said Connell, turning away before Reilly even had a chance to ask "what paperwork?"

Dr. Hayword was sitting with her charts on his lap, leaning back in his chair, arms clasped behind his head.

"You wanted to see me again?" Reilly asked.

"Yes, Ms. Grant," he said, without changing position. "I've been reviewing your records and I'm very impressed with the progress you've made."

"Progress?"

"Don't look so surprised. Surely you must recognize just how much progress you've made since you've been here. According to Dr. Avery's notes, you're ready for discharge. No wonder you were so upset at our meeting earlier this morning. You were quite right about insisting that I read your records more carefully. If it's okay with you, you can leave this afternoon. Check with the nurses, and they'll take care of the paperwork."

"But—"

"No buts," said the doctor, leaning forward and adjusting the charts in his lap. "You're bound to be a bit nervous at first, but I'm sure you'll do just fine. Good luck to you now." He carefully extended his right hand.

Reilly moved closer, bent down, and shook his hand.

"Leave the door open on your way out, will you?" he asked as she backed away.

"Will do," said Reilly, exiting the room with a feeling so light and clean and sweet she didn't even bother to correct him. She wasn't *nervous*. Confused and ecstatic, perhaps—but not nervous.

Connell was waiting for her at the station, as promised.

"Doc will be here in a minute, Reilly. I thought we could take this time to take care of your discharge. I took the liberty of filling out the forms for you. You don't mind, do you? You just have to sign at the X's, and then you'll be on your way out of here." She handed Reilly a thin sheaf of papers.

"I need a pen or something," said Reilly, as she glanced at the papers shaking in her hands.

"Use mine," said Doc as he came up to the counter, reaching into his shirt pocket.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thanks," said Reilly, accepting the slim silver pen. There was silence as she signed her name by the X's, and then carefully handed him back his pen.

"I really stopped by to say goodbye," he said as he took Reilly's hands in his once more. "Take this," he said, pressing a small card into her hand, his eyes dazzlingly brilliant as they held her captive once more. "*You* won't be needing it, I'm sure, but I'd still like you to have it. Pass it on to anyone you meet who you think might need it. If you'll excuse me now, I've left a guest waiting in my room, and I really must get back to him."

She let her hands fall from his, and smiled her goodbye and her thanks, watching until he passed out of sight down the corridor. Only then did she look at the card in her hand. It was an ordinary business card that read "Doc—No Appointment Necessary" and listed a phone number she recognized. Any patient would have recognized it. It was the number of the pay phone at the nurses' station which was reserved for patient use.

Reilly turned and took a long hard look at the middle-aged woman with the warm round face and the friendly smile. Checking carefully, Reilly saw that the name tag still read "Mary Connell, RN."

"No, you're quite right—I don't mind your taking care of the paperwork, not in the least," said Reilly. She paused for a moment, still looking hesitantly at the older woman.

"You busy right now?" Reilly asked carefully, clutching the card tightly.

"Just about to take my break, actually. Why, can I help you with something else?"

"My suitcase," Reilly answered, "I'll be needing my suitcase."

"Certainly," said the nurse, "let's go get it from storage. How about some company while you pack? Maybe we can get it all done and get you out of here before lunch!"

"I'd love it, Mary," Reilly said, an impossibly wide smile spreading across her face as she linked arms with the nurse. "I'd just love it." The two women walked together toward the corridor, both silently smiling; in Reilly's hand was the small white business card; in Mary's hand was Reilly's.

Today *hadn't* turned out so badly, after all. ●

MOVING? If you want your subscription to *Asimov's* to keep up with you, send both your old address and your new one (and the zip codes for both, please!) to our subscription department; Box 7058, Red Oak, Iowa 51591.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A CONEY ISLAND OF THE MIND

Maureen F. McHugh

Maureen F. McHugh's central idea for the following tale came from a conversation with an engineer about virtual reality and the endless possibilities of hot suits. "A Coney Island of the Mind" will also appear in *Coney Island Wonder Stories*, a Wildside Press anthology due out later this year.

art: Laurie Harden

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reality Parlor.

He pays his money and goes back to the cubicle with the treadmill and pulls on the waldos, puts on the heavy eyeless, earless helmet. He grabs for the handlebars suspended before him, blind in the helmet that smells intimately of someone else's hair.

Now he can see. Not the handlebars hung from the ceiling on a tape-wrapped cable, not the treadmill. He is the cat with future feet. He sees a schematic of a room; all the lines of the room are in pink neon on velvet black, and in his ears instead of the seasound of the helmet he hears the sound of open space. A room sounds different than a helmet even when there's nothing to hear.

A keyboard appears, or rather a line drawing of a keyboard with all the letters on the keys in glowing neon blue. Over it in neon blue letters is the message, "Please type in your user ID."

"Cobalt," he types, letting go of the handlebars. The waldos give him the sensation of hitting keys, give him feedback. His password is nagasaki.

A neon pink door draws itself in the velvet wall in front of him. The keyboard disappears and the handlebars appear in pink neon schematic until he grabs them. Then they disappear from sight, but he can still feel them, safe in his gloved hands. He starts forward [the treadmill lurches a bit under his blind feet but it always does that at first so he is accustomed to it, doesn't really think about it, just kind of expects it and forgets about it] through the door which opens up ahead of him, pulling apart like elevator doors into the party.

The party isn't a schematic, the party looks real. The party is a big space full of people dressed all ways—boys with big hair and girls with latex skulls and NPC in evening gowns and tuxes—and as he comes out of the elevator he looks to the right, to the mirrors, and sees himself, sees Cobalt, sees a Tom Sawyer in the twenty-first century, a flagboy in a bluesilk jacket and thigh high boots with a knotwork of burgundy cords at the hips. All angles in the face, smooth face like a razor, a face he had custom configured in hours of bought-time at the reality parlor, not playing the reality streets, not even looking, just working on his own look. Cobalt eyes like lasers, and blue-steel braids for hair.

Edgelook, whatta-look, hot damn.

Not what he looks like at all in the mundane world of Cincinnati, Ohio, but he isn't in Cincinnati, ho, flagboy, he's not in Kansas anymore, he is at *the party*. Here he is, a serious dog, a democratic dog, but he doesn't think he'll spend a lot of time at the party today, looking around he doesn't see anyone he knows. Not that that means they aren't there, because anybody can look like anything, but if they don't have a handle he recognizes and they don't go calling out to Cobalt then they don't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

want to be the people he knows, right? And anyway, this afternoon the partyroom is full of off-the-racks, look-like-your-favorite-movie-star or take-a-basic-template-what-color-are-your-eyes-your-hair-look-like-a mannequin which he can't abide because he's looking for people with style so he angles over toward the far wall [his real feet, his mundane feet in their grass-stained sneakers that he wears when he mows the lawn just keep heading straight ahead on the treadmill, if he angles he'll step off the treadmill, but he turns the handlebars to the left and he's done it so long that he doesn't get confused by his feet saying one direction and the handlebars telling him another] to the far wall, full of blank doorways, and he stops to read the menu.

It's better now that he's turned eighteen, more choices. Games and Adventures, Simulations, Tanks and Airplanes and Spaceships—but he's not really interested in a lot of that because he's on a treadmill, not sitting down, so back to Games and Adventures, Places to Go and Things to Do, where is he likely to find some people he knows, someone to hang out with; Quixote and Bushman and Taipei.

"Any messages?" he asks out loud.

Soft chime that can be heard over the whole room of the party (except that no one else does). No messages. Nobody in the swim? Then he'll look for a place where maybe he'll meet serious dogs. He almost selects Chinatown but changes his mind and [left hand lets go of the handlebars and reaches out] pushes the button for Coney Island.

[Feedback through the waldo, it feels like pushing something.]

A line of electricity forms at the top of the door, a forcefield, an edge of static that rolls down like a window shade only draws down an opening on a place.

Black night on the boardwalk with the ferris wheel and the parachute drop all decked out in colored lights off in the distance. Cobalt steps through the door and his feet thump the hollow wood of the boardwalk. The booths spill bright white and yellow light onto the boards. He can hear the ocean. A guy is selling hotdogs. Coney fucking Island.

So he walks down the boardwalk, checking out the crowd, checking out how much is just program—the sailor and his girl at the Toss The Ring who are always at the Toss The Ring every time he comes—and how much is real people. It's a quiet night on the boardwalk.

Maybe he should go back to the party, check out Chinatown. Hey, he's here, maybe he'll just dogtrot on down the boardwalk, out toward the rides, see if there's someone. Then he'll go back to Chinatown.

Moving along the boardwalk, past the cotton candy, past the tattoo parlor, past the place where the counter is a two-tone Cadillac, dog gone, dog going, into a dog eat dog world.

And the queens (who are mostly black and tall and female and camp,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that being the current fashion in queens) are calling "Hey sweetcakes," "Hey, be my blueboy," "Are you hotwired, babyface?" "Are you wired for sound?" Which he's not because he rents time in a fucking public reality parlor (no pun intended) where they aren't going to supply equipment to wire your crotch.

But it's all just noise, white noise, background hiss, the sound of Coney Island and not what he's looking for anyway although who's to say what he'd be looking for if he had the option? But he doesn't, so he isn't, he's looking for his mates, his team, his dogpack. He's checking under the boardwalk behind the Chinese food place, and watching the Mustangs crawl up the street because Quixote likes simulations, likes to drive fast cars in crazy places. Watching for spies because Taipei likes adventure games where he fights off attackers, watches for gang members because they all like to play Warriors and Coney Island is where it starts, where they catch the subway to the cemetery in the Bronx.

But the streets are all full of programming, of nonplayer characters, and kids without style, which is to say that this night Coney Island is empty.

So he's thinking that he'll check one more place, maybe take in a movie, or call up the airlock and go on to Chinatown, and he stops where he can see the ocean and looks for a moment, the stone dark ocean rolling and making that sound, hypnotizing him and he likes it because there isn't much ocean in Cincinnati, hell, there isn't even much sin in Cincinnati.

She leans next to him with a star hanging off her ear, one lone star in the smoke nebula of her hair, no off-the-rack handle but a costume full of style, like himself, like the dogpack, this woman has taken some time. "Hey blueboy," she says.

"Hey yourself," he says and imagines she smells like perfume, smells like ash. She has full breasts and brown skin in the yellow light. She has yellow snake eyes, not like dice, like rattlesnakes, and hair that doesn't act like real hair at all but fills some indefinite space, swallows light, absorbs light, no reflections. Soft looking. Nice touch, that. She's a chimera, she's not content to take a strictly human template, she's diddled the programming.

He's a lucky dog.

They make noise in the night, what's your name, Cobalt what's yours? (Rattlesnake, he wonders, or cobra, coral snake, black racer, asp, gila monster, his mind all in a rush before she answers—)

Lamia.

Which isn't what he expects at all and doesn't mean a thing except it sounds liquid. He wishes he had more access, he wishes he had preprogrammed something, an ashen rose maybe, to pull out of the air and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

give to her, but all he has are things that are useful in adventure games; a smoke bomb, a rope, a bottle that can be broken and used like a knife.

"That's pretty," he says.

She reaches out and takes his hand. And sighs happily.

The ocean rolls in.

"Squeeze," she says in a throaty whisper.

For a moment he doesn't understand but then he squeezes her hand and she half-closes her eyes. "Flagboy," she says, "I think I like you."

"Want to walk on the beach?" he asks.

She shrugs and kneads his fingers, he can feel her hand, all the bones of it and her long fingers, and she can feel his because of the waldos. He pulls her toward the steps and she gives a throaty, gaspy laugh.

She's wearing high heels, spikes with toes like cloven hooves—except that her feet don't look human. Her smoky hair has horns, then it's a halo, a madonna veil, all smoke. She follows him in a clatter across the hollow boards and down the steps into the sand. Their footsteps become silent [it never feels any different, because his feet are still on the treadmill, and his right hand is still on the handlebars, but his left holds the air and the waldos mimic the pressure of her hand.]

"Not so tight," she says and he loosens his grip on her hand.

Eyes and hands, eyes and ears and hands. How real is real?

The light from the star in her hair falls on her bare shoulders, on her collarbones. Her clothing has no reason to stay covering her breasts but it does. She wouldn't feel it if he touched her breasts, not unless she's wearing a hotsuit. Could she be wearing a hotsuit, have her whole body wired for touch? Does she have a place at home, a treadmill, the whole bit? Spoiled Fifth Avenue girl? LA girl? Maybe she's forty years old, he doesn't know. Maybe she's ugly.

Interesting thought, that. He looks at her smoky hair and her skin and the hollow leading into her heart shaped top and squeezes her hand and she sighs. Huuuhhh.

And he sighs, too. Maybe she's ugly, or fat, or old. Maybe she is blind, or deformed. Maybe she is married. Wild thought that this beautiful girl can be anything.

His heart is pounding. She stops and they are facing each other, holding hands. If they kissed, there would be nothing but air. Strange to feel her through his palm and fingers, the waldos giving him all the feelings of her hand, of the weight of her body behind the hand, and knowing that he could pass his arm through her. She is nothing but light. If he thinks about it he can feel the weight of the helmet on his head.

And her hand. All the bones and tendons and ligaments, the elastic play of her muscle. He finds her fingers, presses them one-by-one. She is watching him with slit pupiled snake eyes gone from amber to green,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

although he can't remember when that happened. The ocean roars behind them.

He laces his fingers through hers. "Where are you?" he asks, although it's rude to ask people that.

"On the boardwalk," she says, her voice coming out in a breath. She is watching him, lazily intent, and he is playing with her hand. She closes her eyes and catches her lip in her teeth. Her face is so strange.

"Don't stop," she whispers and he doesn't know what she is talking about and then he realizes it is her hand, her hand in his blue gloved one. Her face is almost empty of expression, but small things seem to be happening in it independent of anything that is in his face.

"Squeeze," she says again.

Confused, he does, and feels her squeezing rhythmically back, pulsing little squeezes, and he realizes in horror just—

[She's hotwired her hand.]

—as she comes. Eyes shut, her smoky hair rising in horns, she gasps a little. He jerks his hand away, but she is standing there oblivious, and it's too late anyway.

[You take a hotsuit and re-wire the crotch so the system thinks it's a hand, then anytime someone touches your hand . . .]

He is embarrassed, angry, shocked. He doesn't know if he should just go or not.

[His fingers squeezing her and he didn't know.]

"Blueboy," she says, and sits down on the sand. "Oh Christ, blueboy."

He will go and he does [turning the handlebars; feet, as always, straight on the treadmill] and starts back for the steps.

"Come on," she says, "what's so awful about it?"

"You didn't tell me," he says, all indignation.

"Prissy little virgin," she says, and laughs behind him.

"Airlock," he says, which is a system command, a gateway back to the party. The line of static starts at the height of a door, and the forcefield rolls down like a window shade.

"Huff on out of here," she says. "Righteous little bitch. Are you a girl?"

"What!?" he says.

Which makes her laugh. "Well, I guess not, sweetcakes, but for a moment I sure thought you were."

Sweetcakes. [Somewhere in Cincinnati his cheeks are burning.]

"I'm glad," she says, "because I'm not into girls. I just like wearing girl bodies because I like you righteous boys, you sweet straight boys."

He starts to step into the party and stops. "What?" he says.

"Draws you all like moths to a flame," she said. Or he said, or it said.

His first swift thought is that he'll have to change his look, never look like this again, abandon Cobalt, be something else.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She laughs that ashen laugh. "Go on home, blueboy."

And he does, steps back into the party, leaves Coney Island behind. The party, neutral ground, where he shakes his head, dog shaking water off his coat. He blinks in the lights of the party. Thinks of going home, going back to Cincinnati, to thinking about Ohio State in the fall.

Trying not to think about feet like hooves, high heels.

What a frigging nut case!

Bad luck, Quixote is waving across the space. Cobalt doesn't know, just wants to go home.

"Where you been," Quixote says, "you're looking democratic."

Shrugs. What's he going to say, I met this girl—I met this girl and her hand . . . he starts to smile, what a dog story. Quixote is going to be green.

"You won't believe what happened to me in Coney Island," Cobalt says.

He doesn't have to tell everything.

"No way!" Quixote says.

It's a dog eat dog world, sometimes. ●

(for Bob Yeager)

SUSPICIONS

How you stand as the air moves
like blue liquid around you
How you come and go
as if you Inhabit another world
How cold your kisses are
How curious your double-lidded gaze

I've come to suspect the rings
around our Solar System's planets
are but your casual highways
Night is limitless to you
Want more proof?

The hill beyond your yard
Is saucer-shaped

And your smile is purely
scientific

—Wendy Rathbone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SOME THINGS ARE BETTER LEFT

Gregory Frost

The author's last story for *Asimov's* was his delightful fantasy, "The Hole in Edgar's Hillside" (Mid-December 1991). He tells us his ominous new tale addresses "my own high-school reunion, middle-age, and dentistry...."

art: Laura Lakey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So, what d'ya think of old Herbert Hoover High?" Toby Eccles asked Deak, which forced consideration of how politic an answer to give in reply. Eccles, after all, had headed up the Thirtieth Anniversary Reunion committee and, according to Mary Jo Hanlon at least, he'd personally taken credit for the "Elvis" reunion theme. The sequined strings of blinking pastel lights, the movie posters of "Blue Hawaii" and "Spinout" and "Viva Las Vegas"—these things had emerged from Eccles' brain full-blown. Deak had participated in none of it. In fact he had only come home because of death. Appearing at his high school class reunion had been a last-minute and maybe not-so-hot decision.

Then there was Eccles, with three colorful crepe leis hung over his powder blue tux. He still awaited an opinion. Deak stared down into that hopeful, cherubic face and had a sudden recollection of phys ed classes in this very gym—specifically of a fat bully-Eccles pinning him to a mat, dimpled knees digging into his shoulders, while another little bastard delivered unto him a stinging, humiliating "pink-belly" till he screamed.

Do we ever truly forgive cruel treatment at the hands of fools? Deak decided we do not.

"Eccles," he said, "the gym looks like you blew up your sister in her prom dress."

"What?" Eccles' mouth pinched. Deak could virtually read his mind: Could he possibly have heard right? Maybe he'd misunderstood because of the music.

"And the band," said Deak, "that's supposed to be 'Louie, Louie,' am I right? The Holiday Inn must be redecorating or I don't know how you'd have gotten these bozos. It's not even 'our' music. If I had a class reunion nightmare, it would sound like this. In fact I do, and it does." Eccles floundered as to what to do, then desperately tried to laugh it all away—Mike Deak's big joke.

Deak took a sip from his whiskey. Still maintaining an air of camaraderie, he squeezed Eccles' shoulder. It came up to the middle of his chest. "You know what dazzles me the most, though, about our class?"

Reluctantly, Eccles said, "No. What?"

"How many dentists it produced." He pulled out from his inside coat pocket the little pamphlet that listed every class member dead or alive: Where are they now? "There must be two dozen of 'em in here. Out of two hundred and six students, we've got an amazing two dozen tooth cappers."

The ribbing had gone too far. Eccles' fleshy chins quivered. "Yeah, an' I happen to be one."

He did a smart about-face as Deak replied, "Well, I *thought* you were the local Indian agent—the one who sold liquor and smallpox blankets!" he hollered. The nearer faces in the crowd were now looking him over as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they might have done a hair in their soup. The nearest tried to read his name tag. "Hi," he said and the fellow lurched back.

Deak stuffed the pamphlet inside his coat, then nudged his way around the perimeter of the polished gym-and-dance floor toward the open bar. Out of the throng a few voices called to him. In response to one of them—that of Mary Jo Hanlon hallooing like a loon—he nodded and waved broadly without turning to look, and pushed more urgently through the crowd. One conversation with her had more than made up for the past thirty years of prudent dissociation.

Reaching the bar, he ordered a Coke. He'd had his one and only whiskey for the night. Some years earlier he had discovered this simple formula kept him from becoming a spectacular asshole and getting either walloped or sued or jailed. And after forty-eight years, most of them unsupervised, his body didn't much care for booze, either: One good whiskey sufficed, for the sheer ecstasy of that first burnt taste on the tongue and palate.

The band had launched into their lounge-singer's medley of Rolling Stones numbers. Deak found himself laughing as a feeble facsimile of "Under My Thumb" rebounded off the walls. "I used to scream along to this in my car," he told the twenty-year-old bartender, who smiled indulgently in response.

"Sound crew," a woman behind him said, as if it were his name. Deak looked around, fearfully expecting to see Mary Jo hovering there. A slightly plump brunette was beaming up at him, her face vaguely familiar. She had taken off her name.

"Okay, I give up," he said. "Sound crew."

"God, you're tall."

"I was supposed to get shorter?"

"People do, actually, as they get older."

"I have a painting at home that gets shorter so I don't have to. Who are you?"

Exasperated, she replied, "God, Deak, have I changed that much?"

It was the hair-color, he realized all at once. She used to be a redhead. "Grezinski?" In one sweep, he set down his soda, wrapped his arms around her, and lifted her off the floor. "Jesus, Pam, how are you?"

"Different, I guess."

"No, no, it's this stupid light show. I don't know if I'm meeting somebody or having an acid flashback."

"That's a joke, isn't it?"

"Part of it is." He let her finish her laugh. "Normally, I'd ask you what you're doing here, but we know that already. So I'll jump to timeworn pickup line number two. You look terrific. You really do—never mind I didn't know you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pam said, "You lie very well." She glanced past his shoulder. "Although, if you want to see somebody who *really* looks terrific, look at that." She indicated the direction with a bob of her head.

He expected she was referring to a woman, but even in the dimness and the shifting lights, Deak could tell who she meant. He had noticed earlier that the man seemed an anomaly. Of medium height, he was dancing a basic rock and roll step with a beautiful woman who could have been the daughter of an alumnus, and he was by far the better dancer. While those around him were wheezing through their steps, he danced carelessly, as inexhaustible as the sun. His gray suit—visible when he stepped away to spin the woman—had the double-breasted cut of Italian elegance. It was neither the sartorial splendor of a poor man nor of one who had dressed up just to impress the folks hereabouts.

"He looks like about a hundred high-priced New York lawyers I can think of," commented Deak. "So, who is he? Our chaperone?"

Pam Grezinski was smiling puckishly. "Do you remember the name Barry Kinder?"

The name immediately sparked the nasty memory he'd begun moments before with Eccles, stirring up a deep-seated hostility that dismayed Deak. The rage was short-lived; it gave way almost immediately to utter disbelief. The well-dressed dancer couldn't have been more than thirty years old. Deak glanced evenly at Pam. Calmly, he said, "I remember, sure. He was a swimmer, wasn't he? A smart little prick, too."

"Ooh. Right so far."

"Sorry, that's all, Grezinski," he lied. "It was a big class. He wasn't someone I hung out with ever. So, he decided to play a joke and sent his son in his place, huh? The kid looks thirty, tops."

"I'll add your name to the list who've noticed."

"Okay, it's not his son, I got you. Money doesn't buy happiness but it pays for *lots* of face lifts and injections. I think the whole fucking class has had them. On him it worked."

Pam still seemed puzzled. "But you're sure you don't recognize him, he doesn't call up any special memories?"

"I gather you think he ought to."

"I don't know. Earlier in the evening, I overheard him asking about you—if you were coming back for this. I was wondering, too. And here you are."

"He asked about me?" That didn't add up. Deak took out the reunion pamphlet. After a moment of thumbing through it, he exclaimed, "Christ, he's another dentist. Says here he runs his own clinic on Walnut. He sure doesn't dress like a dentist."

"How do dentists dress?"

"Mine always wears this kind of blue smock thing, and rubber gloves."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Very funny. And what's wrong with dentists?"

Deak asked warily, "You aren't one, are you?" She shook her head. "You didn't marry one, did you?" Again she shook her head. "Are you married at all?"

"I am, and I was going to invite you to come meet him—"

"But now you've changed your mind."

"No, but because of this thing about dentists I think you should be kept under observation."

"Pay no attention—it's left over from a run-in I had with Eccles about thirty-one years ago. Is that too long, you think, to hold a grudge?" He glanced again narrowly at Kinder and picked up his soda from the bar. "So, lay on, Macduff," he said, and then followed her trail to the bleachers. She introduced her husband, Bill, who had a graying Vandyke beard and a face that seemed squeezed of its natural juices. Deak shook hands, then sat down beside him on the polished board. He discovered quickly that Bill never cracked a smile, not even at his own wry comments. He owned a stereo and video shop in the Northgate mall. "My mother had a small component system I picked out for her about five years ago," Deak said. "It's not worth a lot, but I'm going to have to get rid of it. You buy used equipment?"

"I'd probably sell it for you on consignment," Bill replied.

"Your mother?" Pam asked.

"Yeah." He sighed. "That's the real reason you see me here tonight. She died ten days ago. She had a seizure while sitting in her car at a stop sign. She wasn't even in town at the time, but here's where her condo is and where dad bought the family plot, so I've been hanging around town a few days."

"Oh, Mike. The funeral?"

"Over. Don't worry about it. She had friends show up, and my aunt. And, hell, I don't know anybody here anymore, so I didn't make phone calls. I don't even know your last name, Grezinski."

"Forbes."

"See?"

Bill said directly, "You look like you've had a rough couple of weeks."

"Maybe." Deak had decided by then that he did not care to unburden his soul in the gymnasium of his former high school; nor did he want to describe the ups and downs of his career as a journalist, having erringly done so already for Mary Jo. His gaze locked on the youthful dancing figure on the floor below. "*He* sure doesn't, though," he said, and directed the conversation back at Kinder.

Pam leaned past him to explain their previous discussion to Bill. "Yes," her husband said. "Not a very friendly guy, but he's had a less than happy life."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Him? You have to be kidding. From the expression on his pretty face, he thinks we're his guests and this is *his* gym. What happened to him so terrible?"

At Pam's urging, Bill elaborated. He explained how Kinder had started a clinic but had by now almost stopped practicing altogether. "Just acts as an administrator. He's pretty reclusive. After college, he married a girl I guess he'd met there. Elizabeth. She came from a well-to-do family on the east coast. For a while she was in Pam's circle at the country club."

On cue, Pam said, "Boy, she was a ditz. Neurotic, crazy. Really unstable. One time, she threw her tennis racquet at a guy who was carrying towels, because he was late."

"Charming. Wealth breeds nutballs, though. Our whole generation turned into egotistical jerks, it's our contribution to American society, along with five-figure shopping sprees as a form of psychotherapy. So, little miss too-much-money made his life a living hell, right? This is supposed to buy him sympathy? You're not going to tell me that's her out there."

"No. Elizabeth killed herself about a year after the tennis incident," Pam explained. "She cut her wrists in the bathtub. He came home and found her."

"Oops," Deak muttered. His worst enemy would have gotten some compassion under those circumstances. He let his ire cool down for a minute.

Bill said, "Kinder became a complete hermit for quite a few years. He fobbed off most of his practice to Eccles and some others, I think. Old school chums. That's how his clinic got started. He had the money by then to do it. After awhile, he started traveling."

Pam added, "He's dated some of the girls I know at the club. They all say he's charming but really sad. He refuses to consider anything like a serious relationship. Tends to be good for only a few dates . . . and, well, he's a little flaky. He's got this thing set up in his house—"

"An alembic," interjected Bill.

"Yes, and sometimes he gets drunk and starts babbling about rituals and stuff."

"Great, a dentist with delusions of alchemy. You're not going to tell me he maintains his looks with a Philosopher's Stone, I hope."

"*No*." She huffed. "Honestly, Deak. About every three years—right, honey, three years?—he goes off somewhere in Europe and gets a treatment. He's really overdue for one in fact but his clinic's had some problems this year, so I guess he hasn't had the chance to get away."

"They treat him pretty well in Europe." Rhetorically, he asked, "Has anybody ever seen him in daylight?" For a moment longer, he stared

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the crowd. He turned away all at once and said, "In the face of tragedy, the man became a narcissistic nut, so who cares?" He set down his drink and abruptly asked Bill, "You mind if I take your wife out on the dance floor for a turn?"

Bill Forbes seemed lost in his own reverie. He glanced up as the request sank in. "To tell you the truth, you'd be doing us a favor, Mike. Pam likes to dance and I can't because of my damn hip. Going to have surgery on it in the fall."

Deak stood up and extended his hand. Coquettishly, Pam took it. She told her husband, "You know, there were a couple of dances my junior and senior years I remember where I hoped he'd ask me."

"No, there weren't," Deak replied. "Come on, let's get down there before this excuse for a song ends." Even as he spoke, the tune died its unnatural death; the band jumped straight into a rendition of "Good Lovin,' " and Barry Kinder stayed on the dance floor. The cheering crowd hopped about furiously, only a few still clinging together. Deak used the opportunity to sidle nearer Kinder.

Close up, he was phenomenal. Virtually no lines etched his face, and it lacked the artificial tautness that repeated face-lifts could bring. His tanned skin shone only lightly with sweat. Kinder's date looked more exhausted than he did; and, watching his ecstatically closed eyes, Deak got the impression he would have been as content dancing without her. Then Kinder's eyes opened halfway and stared back at him in lizardly fashion, the look casually dismissive as though his thoughts had been read as of no consequence. Galled into action, Deak grinned back, bounced over and said, "Hiya, Mike Deak." He stuck out his hand. "Aren't you Barry Kinder, the dentist?"

Kinder shook his hand politely, then with more enthusiasm. "Wait a second, I know you—you write for—"

"I freelance actually."

"Okay. But I've read your stuff. Your investigation of serial killers. What a fascinating *piece* that was." He had stopped dancing altogether, his partner entirely forgotten. "You delved pretty deeply into the social matrix that creates them *and* their ritualistic behavior."

Deak brushed back a forelock of thinning hair. "Nimbly put. Uh—you remember Pam Grezinski?"

Kinder hardly glanced her way. "Of course, Mrs. Forbes. We've met a few times over the years," he commented. "Look, do you have a drink?"

"Not on me. It's sitting with Pam's husband, down the end of the second row there."

"Miriam and I could probably use one ourselves. Why don't we join you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Deak looked delightedly at Pam. "Great," he said. Kinder took his Miriam by the elbow and led her away.

Pam complained, "The shortest dance I've ever had."

"Yeah, but think how much farther this'll go at the club than telling the girls you were on the floor with me." They started back to the bleachers. "He buys his cologne by the quart, doesn't he?"

Pam ignored the jibe. "I didn't know you were a reporter," she said. "What was that article he was asking about?"

"Something I did that came out earlier this year. I'm surprised he knew about it. It was for kind of a specialized magazine. Dentists aren't police psychiatrists, are they?"

"He's amazing, isn't he?" She sounded strangely captivated.

"He's already charmed my pants off."

"Really?" She craned her head back and looked down at his legs.

"With advanced age," he remarked, "has not come subtlety, I see."

"Advanced!"

"It's a fact we all have to live with. At least, most of us do." He climbed up the first row.

Kinder arrived almost as quickly as they did. Miriam hung back with her drink after being introduced all around. Since it was immediately apparent that Kinder wanted to talk to Deak, Pam moved over and chatted with Miriam. Kinder took out a cigarette and, without begging indulgence, lit up. He inhaled like a man who couldn't drag the smoke deep enough, and Deak noticed for the first time a hint of something like strain worked into his expression—the result of all he'd suffered? Somehow, that didn't fit. "Deak and I were absolute enemies in high school," Kinder immediately confessed to Bill. "Yes, somebody once dropped a chemistry textbook down a stairwell onto my head. I had to have traction, and wear a neck brace for a month. I always suspected it was Deak. I had my reasons, believe me. Ah, well, childhood pranks, right? We all played them. Still, I'd hardly expect somebody like you to come back for this desperate affair, Michael. I can't imagine it's your scene."

"You're right about that. The only reason I'm here is that my mother died recently—"

"Ah, of course. I believe I did see something in the paper, or was it the radio? It was sudden, wasn't it? I didn't mean to touch a nerve." He lowered his eyes.

The whole act riled Deak. Kinder was so transparently disdainful of them all. "You didn't touch a nerve," he replied. "It *was* sudden but it'd been a long time coming. An invitation turned up in her mail is all, and I had to be here—you know, taking care of estate business, putting her condo up for sale. I figured this might be diverting at least."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And?"

"It's turning out to be."

Kinder tossed an amused look at Bill. "Give us some examples, Michael."

"It's Mike. Well, Barry, let's see, our homecoming queen is now into channeling and claims to have been a princess in Atlantis."

"The continent or the casino?" Bill remarked.

"That's not so surprising, is it?" asked Kinder. "Everyone who channels thinks they've been to Atlantis."

"Does seem so."

"What else?"

"Two women I dated in my junior year admit to having had liposuction, and Mary Jo Hanlon even confessed that she had the fat re-injected to enlarge her breasts. With her renovations came divorce—she made a point of letting me know that. A lot. Divorce in letters like the 'Hollywood' sign. And then there's you, Barry."

Kinder smiled indulgently.

Deak continued, "You look like an ad for every hopeful health spa on Earth."

"Well, thank you." He tugged at the edge of one eyelid.

"What's your secret?"

"I have a painting that ages while I don't."

Deak laughed and winked at Pam's startled expression. Above her own conversation, she had been monitoring everything Kinder said.

"Dorian Gray, huh?" said Bill.

"Now tell us the truth. How do we late-forties derelicts get in on this rejuvenation?"

Kinder exhaled smoke. "You pay an enormous sum of money to a Swiss clinic every few years and they tighten your jaw, fill up your creases, and put you on a proper, regimented diet according to body type."

"I should tell Mary Jo about it. She looked loaded."

"She does tend to drink too much," Bill chimed in as if deadly serious.

Deak refused to let go. "What's the place called? Might be worth a story to me. They use alembics?"

Kinder's smile evaporated. His hard eyes flicked across Pam and Bill. "I'm afraid I couldn't let you write about them. They're very private, the Swiss. They'd not care for the publicity."

They'd not care? "Catering strictly to the rich and sagging?"

Kinder laughed stiffly as he ground out his cigarette.

The band took a break to a round of applause. Eccles climbed up on the small stage to announce that the main event—that of pointing everyone out to everyone—would shortly begin. As he spoke, the overhead lights came up. Kinder winced at the glare. He turned to his date and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said, "I think I would prefer to miss this. Let's call it an evening, Miriam, what do you say?" She answered that she wasn't certain she wanted to leave. He reached over and squeezed her hand. "The champagne's on ice, darling, waiting for us," he coaxed. "We can dance there, much more intimately." His perfect teeth gleamed. She folded her fingers in between his, her affirmative reply. He turned to Deak and Bill then and said, "I'm sorry, but we've been here for hours already, and this whole business of getting up in front of the crowd is thoroughly obnoxious. It's time to go. Not that you aren't pleasant company, you understand, just that Miriam and I have a private celebration of our own yet to come."

"You conjured it up pretty well. I can see the champagne bucket right next to the loveseat."

"Exactly. Please excuse us. Bill, Pam." He paused, as if to place them properly in the background. "I do hope to see *you* another time, Mike." He led Miriam to the floor.

Deak hesitated a moment, then climbed down and caught up with him. "Barry," he said confidentially, "in all seriousness, I would like the name of your clinic or the doctor at least. Hell, man, I'd love to look as good as you." He hoped he sounded genuinely envious enough to push Kinder's buttons.

Kinder seemed to size him up for a moment. "All right," he answered, "the clinic is in Bern. It's called the Bodelier Clinic. The doctor's name you want to speak to is Gruben, Sepp Gruben. A very nice man—something of a pioneer in his field—but I can promise that you won't get an interview." He seemed to have shed his earlier enthusiasm over Deak's work.

"Swear to God, I'm not going to write about him. Thanks for telling me, Barry. I really do appreciate it. Good night, Miriam. It was nice to meet you." He turned away. Then, putting on a hangdog expression, he went back up and sat between Pam and Bill.

Pam said, "Jesus, he was extra snooty tonight, wasn't he? And I sat here feeling sorry for him, too."

"You got the name of the clinic?" Bill asked Deak.

"Hmm? Ah, no. No, he wouldn't give." He didn't want to lie, but a lifetime habit of guarding sources of information kicked in automatically. After that, the reunion seemed less tolerable to him. He promised to get in touch with Pam and Bill before he left town—the kind of promise that no one believes—then hastily left the gym as Eccles, on stage, was worriedly calling his name.

Later, alone on his mother's couch, surrounded by cardboard boxes, Deak lay awake. In the darkness over his head, he pasted up his motives as he replayed the events of the reunion. Every time Barry Kinder

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loomed into sight, Deak's heartbeat sped up and his jaw tightened, which happened often enough to keep him from falling asleep. He had re-invented his memory of humiliation at Kinder's hands, turned it into a memory from hell, attaching Kinder's perfect face to the body of the seventeen-year-old who yanked up his shirt and then battered his soft belly till he thought he would choke on his own vomit; Eccles grinding his elbows into the blue mat and spitting laughter on him somehow made him despise Kinder more. All around stood other kids in orange and white gym clothes, jeering his name. *No*, he thought, *we do not truly forgive, ever.* Kinder and Eccles—he wanted to dig up enough dirt to make banner headlines across the country, ruin them both. Most of all he wanted to wipe that fucking smirk off Kinder's face. Permanently. He had the ability to do it, and Kinder had handed him the lead. Whatever he found, he would donate to the *Tribune*; let them run his byline for the sheer pleasure.

Then, when the images faded and his anger cooled to where he could see reason again, there remained the matter of Kinder's hands. He was surprised that Pam and Bill hadn't noticed them; but then, they weren't outsiders, they were used to seeing Kinder as he was. Deak had spent more than an hour last night with a group of women who had confessed their cosmetic surgery-sins to him. They all looked tremendous—even Mary Jo Hanlon when he ignored the side of her that was reptilian manhunter. Nevertheless, he could still tell she and the others were older—mature and handsome, the kind of beauty that came with middle-age. Not so with Kinder. There was not a hint of the fix-up shop hung about him. Probably he just paid for better work, and no doubt that would turn out to be the explanation once Deak had spoken to his doctor . . . except for his damned hands. Faces got lifted and creases filled in all the time; hands were another matter. Kinder's hands were as smooth and tanned as his face. Deak, plagued in recent years by minor arthritic cramps, hated him even more for such luck.

Kinder had been perversely smug in giving up the information about the clinic—he had all but outright dared Deak to pry. Maybe he had cheated on his taxes. He must have done *something* illegal sometime. Deak couldn't wait to see the look on Grezinski's face when he finally found whatever he was going to find. She might be mad at him for pretending to leave town and for keeping all his inquiries to himself, but she would love to hear about Kinder.

Instinctively, he knew he had let a little incident from his childhood get out of hand, but he didn't care. He never did get to sleep.

At four he finally picked up the phone and placed a call overseas.

Outside, in the dark, paperboys were heading off for their various routes. Deak could remember what that was like—drinking a glass of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

milk because his mother insisted he have some, and then as a result farting through his deliveries. She'd never understood the problem he had with milk. She would have been upset with him right now if he'd told her he never drank it anymore.

First he had to get an overseas operator to connect him with a Bern operator to give him the number of the clinic. He knew already they weren't going to reveal anything about their patients. Instead, he hoped to play upon the vanity of Doctor Gruben to ferret out whatever facts he could about the egotistical patient; surely any surgeon would be proud of his accomplishments. The hands, for instance, maybe he'd actually worked on them.

While the connections were being made, Deak had another idea. He got up and carried the phone across the room. On a shelf there stood a line of his mother's trophies—she'd won a dozen of them for her shooting skills with handguns. Deak had never understood her hobby; guns bothered him. Under the trophy shelf lay a pile of papers and books that belonged to him. He rooted through the pile until he found a large vinyl-bound book in the school colors of blue and white. Grinning, he flipped to the back of the book.

Kinder was listed in the index, two photos of him: a class photo and one with the swim team. The portrait showed a blond kid overdressed and trying to look angelically serious for the camera. The swim-team photo proved more interesting. Here was the real Barry Kinder standing at poolside, his hair slick with water, a cavalier smirk upon his face. The close resemblance to his thirty-years-older flesh-and-blood counterpart was chilling. Deak closed the book as the connection went through.

A woman answered in German. She might have been next door.

"Yes, hello," he said. "I'm calling overseas, über Meer, yes? My name is Mike Deak. A friend of mine who has used your clinic recommended you to me. My friend's practically a walking ad—um, Anzeige—for you."

"Yes, sir," the receptionist replied. She sounded bemused, like someone who knew he had made a joke but who couldn't understand the context. "Did your friend name his doctor? You would have to speak to the individual doctor. Our specialists are diverse, you understand."

"As a matter of fact he did. It's a Doctor Gruben."

There was a silence on the line, a hiss like ocean spray. Deak thought for a moment that he had lost the connection.

The woman asked, "That is Doctor Gruben, you say?"

Deak's scalp began to tingle. "Doctor Sepp Gruben. Is there more than one?"

"Nein, no. I wanted to be certain."

"Then there is a Sepp Gruben."

"Yes, he was one of the founders of Bodelier. However, he has been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dead for nearly ten years. Your friend has been a patient here a long time ago I think."

Deak sat up. "No, he comes there every three years."

Her perplexity sounded in every word. "Why would he do that?"

"For rejuvenation. Face lifts, mineral baths. Whatever you do that makes him look that way."

"This much confuses me. We are not such a spa. Bodelier specializes in urinary disorders, how do you say, Geschlechtskrankeit? Sexual diseases?"

"And Sepp Gruben's specialty?"

"Dr. Gruben's specialty was gonococcus infection."

Deak pinched the bridge of his nose, his eyes squeezed shut. What direction did he go in now? How could that tie in with Kinder? Why had the bastard given him *this* name, *this* specific lead? Some other question needed asking, some other direction. *Think*, he told himself. "Doctor Gruben—how did he die? Old age?"

"Oh, I should not be—"

"Look, I know this sounds crazy, but I'm calling a long way. His death must have been in the papers there. It's not like it's secret knowledge, is it?" He pictured her—young, uncertain, maybe seated within earshot of some older matron.

"I suppose."

"Please?"

"Yes, all right. It was by accident, in his laboratory. There was a terrible storm. The lights—the power, you know—went off. Dr. Gruben fell and cut himself badly in the dark. He injected a serum he was testing. Through his wound. What is called an anti-coagulant agent. All of his blood escaped and he could not stop it, and he could not call for help because of the phones."

"In a lab, surrounded by all that equipment, he bled to death?"

"Yes, a horrible accident. The storm was what you would say a 'freak.' The doctor was alone, or was there a patient? I forget."

"Sure," Deak muttered. He was envisioning the beakers and ring stands and vacuum jars from the chemistry class of his youth, and the way the chemistry book had dropped in the stairwell when he let go of it. He continued quickly, "You said that was nearly ten years ago. How do you know the details so well?"

"They refer to it in the college, to remind us how careful we must be always in laboratory work. It was a very infamous accident here, that a founder should die of such ridiculous carelessness."

He could assume that the local police had made inquiries but had turned up nothing. And neither had he, he reminded himself. Nothing but speculation. "Well, I'm sorry to have taken up your time."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Perhaps it's another clinic, with a name similar to ours."

"That doesn't seem very likely, does it? Thanks. I'll look you up next time I'm in town." He added in thought, *Which might be sooner than you think.*

Deak got up and poured himself a glass of orange juice. He wandered the small rooms, surrounded by the remnants of a life that had been close to him but utterly separate, almost a mystery. He could sort through the piles and reassemble pieces of that life if he wanted to, probably discover things about his mother that he hadn't known. He preferred not to; whenever he went digging, what he most often found was cruelty, torment, ugliness. He believed that he had, in the process of overturning so many stones, lost the sense for sharing gentler things. It was one of the reasons he was alone—that and a Pyrrhic regard of permanency.

He glanced at the clock. It was not even six yet—certainly too damned early to go hunting a depression.

He tried to assemble the new bits of information he had into the picture of Barry Kinder. Kinder's wife had cut her wrists. He had gone into mourning and then retreated for years, then one day ten years later had taken a voyage overseas. Maybe he'd fooled around in Europe the way he did here; he had the money.

Say that he contracts gonorrhea, Deak surmised. He finds a doctor, who treats him and then who dies by bleeding to death while Kinder is coincidentally on the scene—if in fact that's true. There is no way to be certain without the aforementioned visit to the clinic. But at the reunion, Kinder drops this doctor's name, and in such a way as to guarantee not only that he'll be caught in an absurd lie but that both deaths will thereby appear linked. Had he said *anything* else—if he had refused to submit—there wouldn't be questions. I would be packing and on my way. Why, then, did Kinder toss out Gruben's name?

A trip to the library was required—and possibly to the cops. He wondered whether his journalistic credentials would get him a look at a closed case twenty years old. Twenty years old: a German urologist and Mrs. Kinder. Those two pieces fit together somehow.

"All right," he said to the empty room, "but where's the connection, Mom?" Kinder—here and in Europe. Every three years, someplace. Every three years . . . He wondered how he was going to sit still until the library opened.

Eight hours later, Deak sat in a gray vinyl dentist's chair, a paper towel alligator-clipped round his neck. The door opened and Toby Eccles walked in, his eyes cast down as he read the fake medical biography Deak had filled out. "Mr. Milburn," he said, coming around the chair.

"It's, ah, Deak, actually. Mike Deak."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Holy Christ." Eccles bumped against the bracket tray beside him.

Deak swung into an upright position, feet dangling over the side of the chair. He picked up an oral explorer. "Been admiring your tools, Toby. Are Kinder's this shiny? Yeah, his are probably gold."

"What are you doing here, you asshole."

"Doctor, your language. I dropped in because I need some information, and I figure you owe me a few minutes for all the times I let you beat me up."

Eccles' multi-chinned face went through three or four emotional change-ups before settling on bewilderment. "I've got a patient getting fitted for porcelain in the next room." He looked at his watch. "I'll give you five minutes and that's it."

"Fine. All I want is for you to confirm a couple of things for me about Barry Kinder. Then I'll go away forever."

The doctor looked doubtful.

"Tell me about his wife."

"Liz? Why?"

"I'm thinking about doing a story on him—you know, success, looks, money, this clinic, but behind it all a tragic life, etcetera. You know. Sunday morning magazine exposé."

"No kidding." He shook his head. "Liz'll bring in the readers. An absolute loon. She had a few affairs, even hit on me once." He quickly added, "I didn't go for it, of course."

"Sure. I read all the articles on her from ten years back. They claim she'd had an abortion because she'd gotten pregnant by somebody other than her husband. They blamed the suicide on her state of mind."

"Absolutely true," he said, nodding vigorously. "After she died, Barry hid out awhile. He called me out of the blue one day and said he was going to travel around and try to forget what had happened. We—that is, me and a few other guys—we were already handling his patients from when she died, so we just kept them. Hey, we were all making money off him. It was a good deal."

"And when he came back?"

"Gangbusters. He looked twenty-five. Tanned and healthy. Not a line on him. The women—did they flock to him. It was incredible," he said with obvious envy.

"Then, three years later he took off again."

"Right. And every third summer since, like clockwork. I've got his patients again now."

Deak pursed his lips. "So he's taking off soon."

"Tomorrow. Why?"

Now he had to decide whether or not to explain what he'd found to Toby Eccles. He doubted the pudgy dentist was going to believe him,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then decided he didn't care. "I've found a pattern in my researches to do with this ritual vacationing."

"Well, sure, every three—"

"No, Eccles, I don't mean that. That's a blind, a front. There is *no* procedure of cosmetic surgery that has to be performed every three years. You're a D.M.D., look it up. And the clinic he told me he went to—it specializes in VD."

Eccles' eyes widened. "What are you saying?"

"Well, it isn't AIDS. From here on, things get a lot stranger. You want to hear?"

Eccles didn't reply, but pulled at his lower lip with his rubber-sheathed fingers. All at once he realized what he was doing and wiped his hands against the front of his smock.

Deak said, "You can date for yourself when he took off on his so-called vacations. In all likelihood he *was* a patient in that clinic once. At least he pretended to be. And while he was there, one of the doctors—the one he claims treated him—died under very remarkable circumstances. He lost all of his blood."

"Aw, c'mon—Barry the vampire?"

"No, no. Nothing so obvious. That would be silly. Bear with me. Barry comes back, takes up his practice, and starts fucking like a bunny rabbit."

Eccles nodded in a wistful way.

"Three years later, less a few weeks, a dead woman turns up down on Fourteenth Street here in town. One of those little dive hotels the hookers work out of. I drove past it on the way here. Very tawdry. Once again our local paper made a big deal out of it." He took out his notebook, and flipped through a couple of pages. "Headline: 'Police Suspect Satanist Cult in Death of Prostitute.' She'd been battered unconscious, then drained of all her blood. They suspected Satanists because they found charred remains of some sort of ritual circle adorning the carpet. Blood—hers—bits of bone, and some sort of godawful-smelling paste, unidentified. They went out and arrested a local biker, but turned him loose after two days. No one's ever been charged. It's still unsolved."

Eccles laughed. "Look, Mike, Barry was out of the country. You just said so."

"Uh-huh. You took over his practice—*you* just said so. Give me the date he left. If it doesn't fit, then I'm out of here, like I said—pink belly and all."

Eccles slid off his stool. "It'll take a few minutes to look that up. That's awhile ago, six years."

"While you're at it, check three years back. I maybe need that one, too."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm only doing this," Eccles said dourly at the door, "because of school, I want you to know."

A few minutes later the dental assistant who'd ushered Deak in showed up and insisted that she needed the room. She led him down the hall to Eccles' office, no larger than a small washroom with a desk in it. The walls were hung with honorary plaques next to charts depicting plaque, jokey posters about Mr. Root Canal and the Gingivitis Gang, a bunch of tooth decaying rustlers. Photos on the desk showed a skinny woman and a couple of dumpling-shaped teenagers with acne but great teeth. There was even a photo of a young sausage of an Eccles wrestling in a state tournament. Nowhere was there a picture of Barry Kinder. Deak relaxed a little. Eccles had said that he owed Barry a lot. Deak was willing to bet that Kinder never let him forget it. He sat down behind the desk and waited.

When Eccles returned, his smock was stained with something pink. "I had to finish up the impression for that crown, sorry. Okay, we got the dates off the floppy disks for you." Deak took out his notebook and pen; Eccles unfolded a yellow "Post-It" note. He said, "Six years ago, he took off on the twenty-second of June. Okay? You need the other one, or does that get rid of you?"

Deak shook his head. "Mimi Caudel died the night of June twenty-first." He stared sharply up at Eccles. "And three years ago?"

Eccles stared sourly at him for a moment. "July," he said finally. "Seventeenth."

Deak nodded, flipping back two pages. "Three years ago, the third of August, the body of a paperboy was discovered under the Second Avenue bridge."

"That's it, then. Barry was out of the country."

Deak read from his notes. "The boy had been missing for three weeks. Forensics experts placed death sometime during the week of July fourteen. The boy'd been strangled. No blood in him or at the scene. Assume he was killed elsewhere and dumped there." He closed the notebook. "Getting the idea?"

Crumpling the note in his hand, Eccles tossed it at his desk. "No. You're impugning the reputation of a good dentist." He paused, his mouth open, as if he wanted to testify in Kinder's defense but could think of nothing to add. He switched gears. "Besides, if he murders people here, then why does he bother leaving town?"

Deak shrugged. "Because he's going to get younger and has to make an excuse for it?"

"Come on. He gets a makeover. That's a hell of a lot easier to swallow than this ritual crap."

Deak nodded. "I agree. All right, let's try it your way. Say he has the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

best god-damned plastic surgeon in the world. One who does hands and everything, who takes every little crease out of every little cell like he's ironing the body. In that case, he's a serial killing loon who's compelled to make believe his ritual works. Can you handle that?" When Eccles said nothing, he pressed on. "Look, I didn't start this. Barry did. *He* dropped the name of the doctor and the clinic on *me*."

"Why would he do that? Why would he tell you that?"

Deak smiled. "Pam Grezinski overheard him asking someone about me before I turned up at the reunion. He wanted to make sure I showed. When I did, he pretended he hadn't been expecting me; and then right away for no reason at all he brought up this article I wrote on serial killers."

"So?"

"One of the elements I described was how a serial killer will often leave clues to his identity in his slayings. He's sociopathic—he believes in some way that he's the superior man, so he taunts people with what he feels are obvious leads to himself. Sometimes they are, if you know how to read them."

Eccles sagged back against the wall. "My god. Then he's asking you to catch him." He shook his head. "What about Liz? He murdered her, too?"

"I don't know. I'm guessing this ritual of his required an initial sacrifice to get things rolling and she was not only convenient, she was asking for it. Everybody says so. You say so."

"But, Jesus H. Christ, Mike—you think this ritual of his *works!*"

"Believe me," Deak said, rising to his feet, "I have *exactly* as much trouble with that as you do." He walked up to Eccles and patted him on the shoulder. "Don't worry, Tobe—if it was me in your place, I wouldn't believe me, either."

He went out, leaving Eccles to wrestle with the facts, and before having to explain what he felt he had to do next.

The house lay in an exclusive area of town bordered by a city park. As a kid walking home from school, Deak had cut across many of the broad yards of these same homes. A couple had their own tennis courts.

A brick wall bordered the road. It opened into an arch over a gravel driveway. The VW's engine sounded like a jackhammer in the enclosed yard. Kinder's house stood back from the road, behind a lawn of stately oaks and walnut trees. The drive led around to the rear. Tall hedges surrounded the parking space, which lay empty.

Deak hesitated a moment, testing his resolve, deciding he had to do this. As he climbed out, he wondered if the enemy had skipped the country already. Turning, he got his answer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kinder stood at the top of the steps. He wore dark jeans and a turtleneck—"sleek," as the society pages had described him. "Well, Eccles, you were right about the vampire," Deak muttered.

In his hands Kinder held two brandy snifters. He pressed a new screen door open against his back. It was a pose of nonchalance—nothing could touch him.

He thinks he's the superior man.

More intensely than ever he had as a boy, Deak hated Kinder. As he walked up, he asked, "You always a two-fisted drinker so early in the day, Barry?"

"Let's say I anticipated your arrival," Kinder explained. He handed one of the snifters to Deak at the bottom of the steps.

Deak studied the outstretched hand, the face above him. Had Eccles been dumb enough to call and tip him off? He said, "I suppose you have friends at the library," but accepted the drink. He inhaled, then sipped it. The flavor of an ancient, perfectly smooth cognac lit a delicious fire in his mouth. He swirled the glass, staring into it uncertainly.

"Not at all. I simply make sure to know everything. It's a way I amuse myself. From your comment I know that you went hunting bright and early this morning. I'll bet you haven't even slept."

"No, Barry, but I know a lot about you now, although I'd never pretend to know *every*thing, Barry."

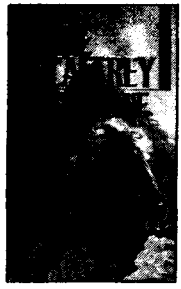
"Of course not—that's the thrill of the work you do. You've gathered all you can, and you hope now to hear my confession, because the story is too implausible, too outrageous. And I do want to confess.

"Why don't you come into my parlor and you can tell me what you've learned. I'll show you some wonderful ancient books I've collected and tell you about my researches. More than that, I'll tell you all that I know about *you*."

Looking dismayed, Deak asked, "What's to know?" but he continued up the steps, compelled by the process he had put in motion—that one of them had put in motion. He noticed for the first time a dozen or so flies swarming on the screen behind Kinder.

His host moved aside, pushing the inner door further open to let Deak enter the house. At the same time, casually, as if accidentally, Kinder tipped his own glass so that its contents poured down past the landing. The flies dove after it. "You'd be surprised how much I know about you, Mike. I sent you the invitation to the reunion; I knew you couldn't pass it up, as I knew you couldn't pass up a chance at me even thirty years later. That's the kind of person you are. I know." He glanced thoughtfully across at the parked Volkswagen, then turned. The screen door banged like a clap of thunder. He said, "I even know your blood type." Beneath his perfectly smooth hand, the big brass knob rattled in its collar as he swung shut the second door. ●

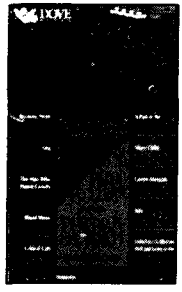
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



DOVE AUDIO

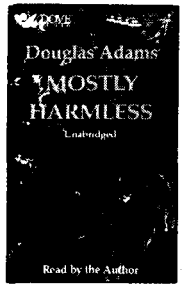
CRYSTAL LINE
by Anne McCaffrey
Read by Adrienne Barbeau

The continuing adventure saga featuring the daring exploits of heroine, Killashandra Ree.
ABRIDGED
2 Cassettes Approx. 3 Hrs. $16.95



BEST OF SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY
stories by Issac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke & others
Various Celebrity Readers

Ten journeys into the imaginations of today's best science fiction and fantasy writers.
UNABRIDGED SHORT STORIES
4 Cassettes Approx. 6 Hrs. $24.95



MOSTLY HARMLESS
by Douglas Adams
Read by the author

At last, the long-awaited fifth book in the increasingly inaccurately named Hitchhiker's Trilogy
UNABRIDGED
4 Cassettes Approx. 6 Hrs. $24.95

Please mail your order with a check to:
DOVE AUDIO, INC.
301 N. Canon Dr. Ste. 203
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

____	CRYSTAL LINE	$16.95
____	BEST OF SF/FANTASY	$24.95
____	MOSTLY HARMLESS	$24.95

Name _____
Address _____
_____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____

Subtotal _____
Sales tax CA residents 8.25% _____
$3.50 shipping & handling _____
Grand Total _____
To order call toll free (800) 328-3683

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EVERYTHING THAT RISES, MUST CONVERGE

Michael Armstrong

art: Laurie Harden

While Michael Armstrong was born in Virginia and raised in Florida, he has lived in Anchorage, Alaska, since 1979. Mr. Armstrong's latest novel, the critically acclaimed *Agviq: Or, The Whale*, was published by Warner/Questar in 1990. The author writes periodically for the Anchorage *Daily News*, and he is a 1975 graduate of the Clarion Writers' Workshop. His short fiction has appeared in *F&SF*, *War in Hell*, and *Cold Shocks*. The following tale is his first for *Asimov's*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Flannery sat at a table right by the door at Hook's, sucking on a Pabst and licking barbecue sauce off her fingers. A plate of decimated ribs lay before her, along with two empty beer bottles and a dirty ashtray. Mother wouldn't have approved of her drinking beer and smoking, she thought—the ribs were bad enough—but Mother was back home and she was here, so to heck with *her*. Hook himself came over, scooped up the empties and the ashtray, and looked down his big gut at her.

"Another, Miz O'Connor?" he asked.

She glanced up, stared at the big man with the greasy red checked apron, and shook her head. "Maybe later, when Scott gets here."

If Scott gets here, she thought. He had called the house from Atlanta the night before, saying he'd rent a car and drive straight out to Andalusia, the O'Connor farm. But Scott didn't know his ass from a red clay road, so Flannery had told him to meet her down the road in Milledgeville, in the nearest thing that passed for civilization in those parts. That morning, Mother had dropped her off in town—to mail a package, Flannery had told Mother. She'd set off promptly to Hook's from the post office, and Scott was supposed to meet her at Hook's and she'd direct him home. Flannery just knew he'd get lost, and so had taken the opportunity to intoxicate herself for his arrival. When and if he got there, she'd serve to guide him to Andalusia, and the peacocks, and that damn room where she wrote what she supposed passed for literature.

She took another sip of the Pabst's, swished it around in her mouth a little to wash away the barbecue sauce, and licked her lips. The sauce had crept into the cracks at the edges of her mouth the way barbecue sauce does, and the sugar and the garlic stung a bit. Flannery sighed. Crude pleasures. She wanted to light up another cigarette, but Hook had taken away the ashtray and she didn't want to bother him. She sighed again, and ran her fingers through her short spiky hair.

Spiky. That's how the Brit spy writer Le Carré would describe her hair, she thought. She remembered when her hair had come all the way down to the crack of her bottom, brown and wavy and thick, back when she'd been at the University of Iowa writer's workshop, meek and shy and writing to beat all. Old Lemon Lips, her professor and thesis adviser, had made a pass at her once *in conference*, had touched her hair and stroked it and then said something she hadn't expected to hear from a man not bound to her in holy matrimony, not just then, and not from her professor. So she quit wearing her hair down, started braiding it tight into a bun. When the lupus hit and the drugs made her hair drop out, it had been like a redemption, somehow, like Joan of Arc at the stake.

Flannery looked at her watch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Late. Her damn agent Scott was late. Well, that was New York publishing for you, she thought: always late, never on time with offers or contracts or checks or royalty statements, unless you didn't need the money—which had happened only once, anyway, when she had sold two books on exactly the same day—and *then* the checks came within ten days after signing the contracts. She caught Hook's eye and he was about to come over with a fresh ashtray and another beer when Scott walked in the door.

With one neat gesture she waved two fingers at Hook, and then signaled Scott over to her. He strode in, wearing a wool suit, thin hair combed across his bald head and damp with sweat, his forehead beaded, his collar wet, even the front of his shirt wet, but he wouldn't take off his silly coat. Her agent sat down opposite her. Hook set a cold beer before him, no glass, and laid a beer and a clean ashtray before Flannery.

"Anythin' else, Miz O'Connor?"

"No, thank you, Hook."

Scott looked at her, scanned her in that way people did who knew she was dying, as if they might detect any new signs of impending doom. He smiled, wiped a white handkerchief across his brow, and smiled again, a weak smile.

Okay, she thought. She knew people who cared about her—and Scott did—didn't want to see her dying, but then she also knew that when you did see someone dying, it sometimes made you feel all smug and superior, as if death would pass you over. Fat chance. Death didn't play favorites and the odds meant nothing; the Dread Bitch would just as soon strike an infant as a tottering biddy like her. Flannery held out a cigarette to Scott and her agent lit it for her.

"You're looking . . . better," he said.

She smiled. "The ACTH—the cortisone's helped a lot. Some darn new formula."

"Hair's growing back."

Touching her head again, as if she'd suddenly noticed it, Flannery grinned. "Momma puts pin curls in so I don't 'look like a GI,' she says." She took another sip of beer. "Maybe when I pick up my Hugo I can slick it down and dye it silver so those silly fans will think it's some kind of space helmet."

"You're getting the Hugo? How do you know that?"

"When the Discon chair called me up to see if I was coming, I told him I'd be damned if I was going to go all the way to Washington for nothing—'not with my *illness*' I said—so I asked him if there'd be a good reason to go, and he said there would be, he was pretty sure. Besides"—Flannery smiled, the points of her canines poking out slightly from her upper lip—"did you read the only real competition, that story

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by Harlan? 'Man on the Juice.' If I were Ellison I would have used a pseudonym."

"Now, now, Flannery . . . " Scott said, shaking his head. "So you're going to the con?"

"I'm going. The doctor says I can travel, so I figure, I might as well indulge my vanity, even if it is just a damn science fiction award. If I *don't* win, I'm kissing sci-fi goodbye, and if I do win"—she reached down into a satchel at her feet and laid a brown wrapped package before her agent—"I'm kissing sci-fi goodbye, too. I'm done with the damn spaceships and robots, Scott. This is the real thing."

He delicately untied the package, laid open the manuscript like a dissected shark. "*Wise Blood*," he read.

"My *first* novel, before *The Sands of Mars Take All Time Away*. I did it at Iowa and got the Em-Eff-Ay with it and *Sands* and then burned it. You sold *Sands* and that was it: I was a real writer trapped in a science fiction writer's body. So now the lupus has done a little surgery on me and I found *Wise Blood* again. Momma did, that is—found a carbon in the attic. I'd forgotten I had mailed it to her." She tapped the open package. "That's the *tenth* draft. Someday they'll invent computers that revise things instantly, but Mother and I typed all ten drafts by hand, each and every time."

"You want me to sell it, Flannery?"

"No, I want you to encase it in lucite and make it a doorstop. Of course I want you to sell it. Hardcover, Giroux or someone classy like that, a respectable publisher."

"You're a *science fiction* writer, Flannery."

She sucked in on the cigarette, blew smoke out into his face, and smiled. "I'm a *writer*, Scott. What do I have to do to quit being a science fiction writer—*die* first?" Flannery glared at him, regretting the barb almost instantly, but knowing the truth of it.

He sighed, looked down, then straight up at her. "What do you want, Flannery? Every short story you've published has either won or been nominated for a Hugo. You are the first Southerner to get a Hugo, the first woman. You write rings around Heinlein and Asimov and all those biggies, you get letters from women writers out there by the bushels." He sighed again. "Come on, Flannery, you *sell* better than anyone else in science fiction *and* you got a movie made from your last novel. You even make a respectable living at it. Isn't that enough?"

Flannery took a sip of beer, shook her head. "I'm dying, Scott. And before I die, I want to publish a book my momma will be proud of. Before I die, I want *The New York Times Book Review* to review me, and I want . . . I want my novel to be published in hardcover, be remaindered two months after publication, and wind up on the regular shelves of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

library, up there in the musty corners where only high school seniors writing term papers venture.

"In short, Scott, I want immortality."

Her agent nodded at her, and tied the manuscript back up. "I'll try, Flannery. I'll try."

Later that summer, when it came time for Flannery to go to the Worldcon and get "that damn silver penis," as she liked to call the Hugo when she got angry at Mother and wanted to shock her, of course Flannery's lupus got a little worse and the doctor told her she couldn't travel. Flannery tried to argue her way, insisting that a train "was no worse than a room on wheels," but the doctor said, no, that wasn't the point, and she knew it. Mother backed the doctor up, and that settled that. She knew she could argue against Mother or against the doctor, but when they both got together, it was Sherman barbecuing Atlanta. She didn't go.

And so on the day when she heard the train whistle on its way to Milledgeville and on to Savannah and Washington, Flannery imagined herself on it, getting that strange feeling she got when she wrote where she put herself in another place and was *there* and not here, and then she realized where she was. Sick, her kidneys paining her, perhaps the last honor of her life proceeding without her, alone except for her mother in that bright room by the tree with the peacocks.

Regina had brought her the afternoon mail: some fan letters, forwarded from her publisher, what looked like a check from Scott, another letter from Scott, and a brown packet. She liked packages best, even over checks—checks had lost their charm once she no longer cared about the money—and so she opened that first. An address in Pennsylvania written in neat, precise block handwriting covered almost the entire back top, her address in larger printing on the front. A woman's hand, she thought, by the long letters and the grace of the style. She'd sent it to Milledgeville, just "Flannery O'Connor, Andalusia, Milledgeville, Georgia," trusting the mail, and of course, she had been right. The family name would have been enough without the farm name, but Flannery liked that whoever had thought to add it.

A book, she saw, *The Mile-Long Spaceship,* by Kate Wilhelm, and then a copy of the July '62 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction,* the one with the Emshwiller cover of the tattooed robot that illustrated Flannery's Hugo nominated story, "Parker's Back." A smaller package with Miss Wilhelm's address on it and a wad of stamps stuck to it fell out from between the two, along with a short letter.

"Dear Miss O'Connor," the letter read. "I was sorry to hear that you wouldn't be attending the Worldcon, as I'd hoped to have the honor of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

meeting you and giving you my book in person. You cannot know how much your work has meant to me in the development of my craft and art. Since I cannot meet you in person, would you please be ever so kind as to autograph this magazine and return it to me in the enclosed envelope? I apologize for intruding on your privacy, and hope you will not be too upset at your agent for giving me your address. We are, after all, represented by the same firm, although I work with one of the new bright young men just out of college who still maintains the quaint notion that publishers are honest." Miss Wilhelm had signed it with her full name, in large, flowing script.

Flannery smiled at the letter and the brevity of it. Short, to the point, and literate: the best kind of fan letter. Before she forgot, because she tended to forget things sometimes, she opened the magazine to her story, "Parker's Back." The beginning words of her story stared up at her in slightly larger type: *Parker's arms were resting on the front porch floor, snapping beans.* Between the title and her byline Flannery signed her name and a short "to Kate Wilhelm, best of luck"—she could never think of anything better to sign—and then, for good measure, signed the contents page. Flannery was never quite sure of the protocol, though she knew signing one way worked for collectors and another worked for propriety. Now that she was dying, Flannery had no patience for collectors, but much patience for propriety. Was she not a Southerner?

On the contents page she noticed another story by Wilhelm, "The Man Without A Planet," and smiled at the modesty of the young writer. Wilhelm hadn't even mentioned being published in the same issue. Flannery shuffled to the big overstuffed chair by her bed, the one she did her reading in, the upholstery on its arms worn from generations of elbows and the floral pattern faded from years of basking in the sunlight that fell through the south-facing window.

As she read, Flannery thought of her own work and of the work of other science fiction writers. One of her bad habits had always been to compare her work to others, to marvel at the skill and imagination of writers who constantly challenged her. Everything in her told her such comparisons were unfair, because she knew a writer wrote and a writer shouldn't think of how others wrote. They wrote the way they did because that's how they did it. It worked or it didn't but just because it might work one way didn't mean her writing wouldn't work another way. An orange and a lemon still tasted tart, and that's the way it was.

Still, certain phrases impressed her. Wilhelm had a way with describing eyes. The viewpoint character, Rod's, eyes were "gray like his father's," and a minor character had eyes "the color of overripe, peeled grapes." Tight, compressed, the story didn't stray, didn't go beyond one simple, powerful emotion. Flannery knew the story worked because she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

felt that shiver you feel when a story hits you just right. As she read it she wondered why such a dog of a story like "Man on the Juice" could get a Hugo nomination while Wilhelm's story had no greater honor than being published in *F & SF*. Well.

Perhaps that would be good: Ellison would win Hugos and be trapped in a science fiction writer's body, just like her, forever and ever, and perhaps Wilhelm would win no awards and be blessed, be able to write beyond. Or maybe it was just that Wilhelm was a woman, and everyone knew women didn't win awards, except for Flannery O'Connor; it just wasn't done. Although, Flannery had noticed, it seemed like women wrote better than men, though she had no idea why.

As she opened and glanced at the rest of her mail, Flannery thought of Miss Wilhelm up there in Washington, of the convention proceeding without her. She thought of witty things she might have said on panels, of the people she might meet. Though she had often hated the clubbiness of the field, the bigotry and sexism, when you got beyond that—if you got beyond that—she found the companionship often comforting. No one had really advertised her disease—the last thing she wanted was to be some damn poster child in science fiction—but word had gotten around and occasionally some writer she thought hated her would drop her a card or a line, wishing her well. It would have been nice to see some of those people and thank them for their kindness.

But she also thought of the fans, the worst and the best of them. The best of them ran the conventions, working impossible hours for nothing, only their love of a peculiar kind of fiction keeping them going. The worst seemed to be twisted bottles with cryptic notes cast into a sea they could not understand and relieved to find themselves washed up on a beach that, while lonely and far from the rest of humanity, at least offered some refuge. Flannery remembered a slogan she had seen on a T-shirt at the last convention she'd been to, before the lupus really got savage, when she won her first Hugo. "*SCIENCE FICTION IS WHAT'S LEFT WHEN REALITY WEARS OUT*," the T-shirt had read. Ironically, that seemed to be the position of many of the people who read, wrote, edited, and sold science fiction. Reality had worn out for them, it had not worked for them, and so they retreated into a tiny ghetto and fed off the scraps the rest of society allowed them, like so many other people cut off from the world had fed off the scraps, and so on and so on.

The horrible truth of it, Flannery knew, was that reality was like that: it always wore out for many people. At least in science fiction you could find a refuge, even a home. You could find a way of thinking which allowed you to go *beyond* reality when reality didn't work.

When bodies didn't work. . . .

Flannery read one more letter in the morning's mail, the envelope

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from her agent, Scott, which didn't look like a check. She had been saving it for last because she was afraid of what it might be, what it might contain. The bad thing about having an agent meant that good news and bad news could both come in the same kind of an envelope. When she had sold her fiction on her own, at least a manila envelope made the truth obvious. With an agent . . . the agent got the manila envelopes. She tried to convince Scott to make a phone call when he had good news, but he was old fashioned and thought long-distance telephone calls were for births, deaths, and disasters.

She scanned down the crisp white paper, bit her lip and read from the first paragraph to the second. "Damn," she muttered, and hit the armrest of the tattered reading chair. "*Damn.*"

Scott had sent *Wise Blood* to Giroux at her insistence, and of course they had not taken it. "I'm sorry that I can't figure out a way of characterizing this book in so far as I have to figure out a way of publishing it," Scott quoted the editor as saying, "In a way, Miss O'Connor's work evokes Philip K. Dick and his *Pilgrim on a Hill*, but unlike Dick I cannot find a hook to hang this impressive work upon. Miss O'Connor's considerable talents are bound to make another editor feel more enthusiasm."

"A hook to hang upon," Flannery muttered. Well, of course Giroux could figure out Dick: he didn't write science fiction—except for that brief foray in the '50s until he wisely saw the light and began denying he had ever written such a thing. And Dick had won a Pulitzer, so of course no editor would have trouble selling him. He could write about electric sheep and men who healed pots and other such wonko things, and all an editor would have to do is put PULITZER PRIZE WINNING AUTHOR over his name and who would question it? But a Hugo? What would a Hugo get you but books that didn't fall over?

Flannery sighed and looked out the window at the noon sun, now risen up over the oak tree out her windows. Her peacocks strutted across the lawn, feathers spread and catching the sun. *Wise Blood* would sell, she knew, would find a home somewhere, even if it was as the lead title for some adventurous SF editor who could fool his publisher, but she hoped she wouldn't have to die first. If she could just get that . . .

And thinking of it, she knew she probably couldn't.

The night before the Hugo awards, Flannery dreamed of winning the Hugo. The memory of her first Hugo seemed to intrude on winning the latest one. She dreamed of being young, that had been the strange part. In her dream she felt healthy and alive, her hair thick and long, her skin firm and not puffy, her limbs and joints and kidneys without pain, without swelling or agony. Harlan sat at her table, a gorgeous blonde next to him, and she remembered that Harlan hadn't been up for a Hugo

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when she had won the first one. There were a few more people in the dream she didn't recognize, a roomful of people who were faces and bodies, indistinct and vague. The lights in the hotel ballroom had been dimmed, and tacky red candle lanterns glowed on each table, so that the entire room seemed to throb like the inside of a heart.

Of course she won the Hugo. She had known that before and she knew it in the dream. Robert Silverberg announced it, just as he had announced her first award, only this time he got the title right. Flannery felt herself float up to the podium, as if the audience rising to their feet carried her up there on their applause. One single spotlight shone down on her, so that in the dream she could only see the edges of the audience and not their faces. The applause rolled across the room toward her, its steady beat making her skin quiver, the adulation making her flush.

"I . . . " she started to say in the dream, and the room quieted a little. "I . . . ," she tried again, and the applause wore out, though no one sat. She had that feeling in her dream that she had heard other people had, the feeling where you couldn't do something and couldn't move, and that you knew it was a dream but the terror held you, petrified.

"Thank you," she finally said, and the next morning as she woke up Flannery remembered the relief in finding words. "Thank you. I want to thank"—and again she froze in the dream, but only for a moment—"my mother, Regina, of course; and my agent, Scott; my publisher, Ace; and Harlan and the other nominees for making it so hard to win"—she held the little rocket ship toward Harlan, nodding at him, and he smiled—"and all of you for honoring me."

They applauded again. Flannery remembered *seeing* the people applaud, except for one lady sitting in back. The dull light lit the room, except for the woman, a woman dressed all in black whose hooded robe seemed to suck the light into her. No light shone but in the absence of light Flannery could see her, though that made no sense. The woman in black didn't applaud, just sat smoking a long, white cigar. She blew out a cloud of smoke and when Flannery looked again, she wasn't there.

And Flannery had woken up. She woke up with the vision of the woman in black and the sure knowledge of winning and the memory of thanking everyone there for the award. As she rose from sleep and the dream floated away into forgetfulness, she wondered if she had made it to Washington if she could have thanked anyone for the Hugo—thanked her fans.

Thank them? she wondered. Could she say that? Why should she thank them? Her fans had trapped her in science fiction, put the walls around her, honored her and rewarded her so that she couldn't leave, couldn't write anything the literary writers would accept. Thank them for what, for killing her? But then, she had put those walls up, too, hadn't she?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sun rose up, a sliver of light in the broad window. She pursued the thought. She had made a choice to write science fiction, an honest choice, real and true. She'd written well, hadn't she? She had done her best. Perhaps the work was strange, strange in its obsession with vulgar people, and perhaps she could have written about the same ideas by putting her grotesque characters in the real world. Maybe she could have written Southern pastoral tales about a Bible salesman who stole wooden legs—like she'd joked one time about doing—not about robots struggling for humanity. But she *had* to put the grotesque outside this world, as if to say, that's where we *should* put them. She needed that distance, needed that space—hah! space, she smiled at her pun. For some reason she couldn't write about the here and now, couldn't write about what was but only about what could be.

Flannery smiled at the thought of her fans, at the dream. In wakefulness she could see their faces, their lonely faces, so silly and yet so serious. They had brains that could soar to Betelgeuse but didn't have the literary wit to get beyond Detroit. So what? Did it matter? She loved them still, queer as they might be. The memory of the dream lingered with her, the memory of touching the shiny rocketship award. In the thought came the one bit of sadness of not receiving the award in person, of not being there to hold it: she could not share it. She could not pass it around at parties, could not let young writers stare reverently at it or young fans worship at the altar of wonder. That would be the sadness: not to share the Hugo that wasn't just her Hugo, not really; it belonged to everyone.

On the evening after that dream Scott did consent to use the modern invention of long-distance telephone, and called her from Washington: she had won the Hugo, as implied, as promised, as dreamt.

In the late autumn twilight, after an afternoon storm when the air had become fresh and still crackled with ions, Flannery lay in her bed in the mansion, the sun poking down through a dark cloud and shining in her window. The wind came through the open window, rustling the gingham curtains, and she could hear the peacocks on the lawn, could see them pecking in the damp soil for bugs washed up by the rain. One peacock in a cedar tree spread his feathers, and the light shone through them, the eyes on the fan iridescent and shining. She sat up a little to see the bird better, and felt a pain shoot through her thigh.

Regina came into the room then, rushing over to her bed when she saw Flannery grimace. Flannery smiled, trying to make it easier on her mother. Sometimes she hated what the lupus had done not only to her, but to her mother. She hated that her mother had to nurse not one, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two family members; she had to watch die not only her husband but the child they'd raised together.

The black bitch Death hovered in the edges of the room, walked across the lawn with the peacocks. Flannery saw her often, felt her breath on her every night, heard her whisper in her ear every morning, "tomorrow, tomorrow." Yet tomorrow would come, and she had fought Death one more day, but she didn't think it would be much longer.

Her kidneys had gone, the doctor had said, and in that sentence of death Flannery thought of a science fiction world, a future world where you could swap kidneys like old shoes. There would be shiny mechanical kidneys that worked better than the organic ones. She imagined future worlds where robots dispensed wonder drugs for anything, even lupus, even cancer, where no disease could lay waste to anyone. But not this world, she thought, always coming back to reality. Not now.

"You feeling okay, sugar?" Regina asked her.

Flannery tried to smile, but another bolt of pain rippled through her, and she shook her head. "I'm dying, mother."

Regina bit her lip, nodded. "I called the priest."

"Did the mail come, mother?" She knew it must have, she could hear the small truck rumbling up the county road. "Did Scott write?"

"Right here." Regina pulled a letter—already opened—out of a pocket of her housedress.

"Read it, mother."

"It's not good news."

Flannery swallowed, felt that hard knot again in her stomach. "I know."

"He says Scribner's didn't want *Wise Blood*, either. They say that 'Miss O'Connor shows great talent'—but you know that, dear—'but the book just seems too bizarre for us to take.' Scott says he'll try Harcourt-Brace next, thinks they have a good shot." Regina stroked Flannery's cheek, pushed a hair back from her face. "Scott thinks 'Everything That Rises Converges Into Deep Space' has a chance at the next Hugo. It would be a fourth, dear, the most anyone has ever won."

Flannery glanced over at her three Hugos on a shelf by the window, smiled at them.

"Maybe you'll be able to go and pick it up?"

"I won't be going, mother," she said. "You know that."

"Yes, Flannery. I know."

Flannery stared out the window again, watched two peacocks face off at each other, spreading their fans and shouting. She smiled, watched the shaft of sunlight move along the window toward the Hugos on the shelf.

"Mother," she asked, and saw that the room had grown dark and it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was near midnight. "Mother, could you move my Hugo—the third one, for 'Parker,' over by the window, into that shaft of light?"

"Light?" her mother asked, but moved the Hugo, the shiniest one, over on the shelf. "Here?"

"*There*, Mother."

Flannery looked at the Hugo, at the starlight beaming down on it and the pink light glowing from it, the shimmery light bathing the little rocketship and making it glow. The light spread from the Hugo and moved toward her, the Hugo growing larger, a long finger reaching for her, and she felt the pain wash from her body, felt her body grow light and weightless.

Next to her the priest mumbled and she felt his warm fingertips touch her forehead, cross her chest. Regina said something, and her hard, gnarled hands stroked her hair. The light moved toward her, the rocketship surrounded her, and Flannery O'Connor felt herself rise up, everything really rising that must converge. She felt herself rise up from the common and normal world with the glorious peacocks and the hard red Georgia clay roads, up into space and the worlds of all possibilities. ●

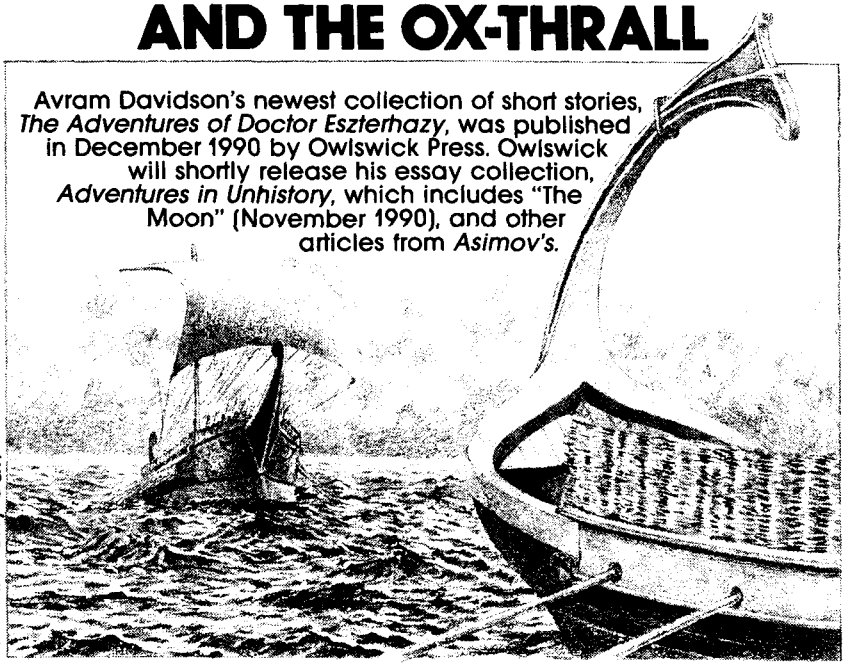
STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1A. Title of Publication: Asimov's Science Fiction. 1B. Publication No. 522-310.
2. Date of Filing: September 3, 1992. 3. Frequency of Issue: Every 28 days with special issues in April and November; 3A. No. of Issues Published Annually : 13; 3B. Annual Subscription Price: $34.95. 4. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not Printer): 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168-0035.
5. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters of General Business Offices of the Publisher (Not Printer): 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168-0035.
6. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: Christoph Haas-Heye, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168-0035; Editor: Gardner Dozois, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168-0035; Managing Editor: Sheila Williams, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168-0035.
7. Owner: Dell Magazines, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168-0035; Bertelsmann Publishing Group, Inc., 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10103.
8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: NONE.
10. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: (A) Total No. Copies (Net Press Run): 103,600; (B) Paid and/or Requested Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales: 9,000; (2) Mail Subscription: 63,000; (C) Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 72,000; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means; Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies: 300; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 72,300; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing: 4,400; (2) Returns from News Agents: 26,900; (G) TOTAL (Sum of E and F should equal net press run shown in A): 103,600. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: (A) Total No. Copies (Net Press Run): 104,000; (B) Paid and/or Requested Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales: 10,000; (2) Mail Subscription: 66,000; (C) Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 76,000; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means; Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies: 300; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 76,300; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing: 1,000; (2) Returns from News Agents: 26,700; (G) TOTAL (Sum of E and F should equal net press run shown in A): 104,000.
11. I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.

Christoph Haas-Heye
Publisher

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEA-SCENE, OR, VERGIL AND THE OX-THRALL



art: Anthony Bari

Avram Davidson's newest collection of short stories, *The Adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy*, was published in December 1990 by Owlswick Press. Owlswick will shortly release his essay collection, *Adventures in Unhistory*, which includes "The Moon" (November 1990), and other articles from *Asimov's*.

Avram Davidson

The discus, Vergil (called Magus) could not throw; no race-horse would suffer to bear his untrained weight; and nor could he, limbs oiled and dusted, either wrestle or run the course. But he had one gift which they who waited beneath the echoing portico for the sound of the trumpet had not: he could think two clean different thoughts at once. The boat's cracked boom sang a sort of woeful, keening song in the hollow, he thought of how he must now swiftly work with his fingers, and he thought as well of the tenth and twelfth lines of the viith book of *Concerning Things Seen in the Summer*, the provenance of which is unknown (some say that the Cumaean Sybil idly threw it in to boot when she finally sold her own prophetic book of leaves to Tarquin the Proud; this is mere legend), videlixet, *Against all Cities of the World may Carthage hope to triumph, save against Grand Babylone may Carthage lift no Thing of Bronze nor Iron. And doth Carthage know this well. . . . Anent that Soldane of Babylone which did eat Grass like ane Ox, an Account is given. . . .*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That account must wait another occasion.
And Babylone was far away.

By some traditional estimates it was the green seas which were the most dangerous. But the sea today was grey, and much it liked him not.

Babylone was as far away as Agamemnon's purple cloak, but Carthage—wherever Carthage was, nowadays—was not so far. And Carthage still claimed and Carthage still kept, the secret of the purple-bearing sea-shell which had made Carthage rich. So-called "free" ships, free from the brazen yoke of the Punic city, might sail ever so far and never so far for plants like the orchil-plant to supply a mock-purple for purple dye (not so good: but good enough: *cheap*): yet ever the ships of "the New City" sailed ever so far to intercept. Purple she claimed by the favor of Juno for a monopoly as of by natural right. She called this *The Compact,* and she and her ships enforced it by cold grey iron and by pitiless bronze.

To return from Huldah and from Huldah harbor to Naples for a while, Vergil had boarded this small chance-visiting "free" craft. And here he was now, on the wide though not unbounded Inner Sea.

The winds blew, the spray flew—penny poetry all to the side, it was certainly not one of the best days to be at sea; and the large vessel was assuredly gaining on the smaller . . . not because it was larger, because it carried more sail. They would not try arrows, although the ships were likely within bow-shot; the winds made either arrows or crossbow bolts too chancy; the Punes would wait till they were near enough to grapple; and then, the small ship hanging helpless in the large one's iron grip, then they would board. The large ship acting as an immense sea-anchor, then they would board. Sword, dagger, spear, club: it made no difference, superior numbers would tell, and tell in short time. In perhaps less than one run of a smaller sand-glass. . . .

"Juno!" the Punic corsairs shouted, *"Juno! Juno!"*

. . . *much-loved by Juno, ancient Carthage* . . . how did it go?

So near were the ships to one another, that Vergil could clearly see the mast and flaxen sails of the pursuer straining on their leather lines, the braided leather shroud-ropes which held fast the mast and controlled the sails . . . the sails and mast of the pursuing ship, that is. That was it. His smaller ship might have hoped to out-run the chaser; the larger ship meant a larger surface to drag against the sea; and even its larger sail might not have sufficed to come within grappling distance . . . except that the smaller craft had dared to hoist only its own smaller sail: even before the hostile vessel had come charging out of the mist—had there been but a small patch of it, a wind strong enough to fill the sail would have been strong enough to blow the mist away: but it lay thick and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lowering and heavy upon the whole face of the sea—there had not been time then, and there surely was not time now, to lower said smaller sail and then bend on the larger; even if they wished to risk (and risk it certainly would have been, and a deadly risk, too) the braided ropes of rushes: papyrus and iris: which were all they had now, their old leathers worn out and cast aside—such had been their haste to leave that last island—to hold mast and sail in check. In haste from mere rumor of a Carthage ship in the cold current between the Columns of Atlas (the Pillars of Hercules, some called them*), today's wind would have soon frayed and snapped the rushy ropes.

By all law of the sea and by several treaties, the western part of the Inland, the Mediterranean, Sea, was Imperial Roman water: Carthage no longer had the right to have a ship of such size there; besides: Carthage had been destroyed . . . hadn't it? But, city destroyed or not, set up somewhere new or not, this *was* a Carthage ship. And that was the kernel in the nut: the only way that the Carthagans could hope to keep secret the presence of their ships in these waters or in the circumfluent waters of the great green Atlantic, was by the most relentless pursuit of any other ships which they might encounter, or by which they might be espied. To pursue such ships, to capture, and to destroy them and their people. It was a Carthage ship, and if it caught them, it meant their death. The Punes would not even tarry to torture, if any *Romani* survived the fight they would be drowned instanta.

And Vergil, who had begged a passage out of Huldah harbor (*her* name was also the place-name), which lies beyond the dwelling-places of the Lotophagi, aboard the small "free" ship in search of purple-plant—there was no purple on the coast of Huldah, but there was fresh water—Vergil had no caul with him, such as saves from drowning either in the circumambient fluid of the womb or in the narrow seas and the vast stream of Ocean.

The hostile vessel's master, mates, and crew had not paused to take up their oars and set them in the thole-pins and could not pause now; they had been proceeding purely under sail, and under sail they must continue. Vergil's smaller craft had had its oars out, helped by the skimpy sail, and at their oars the men continued to strain.

Oft was I wearied when I worked with thee.

Indeed.

As Vergil watched, thinking that the best he could do would be to keep

*Melcarth and Memnon, some say they be called. Jachin and Boaz, some say they be called; Maimon and Minrod, others. What sayeth **the Matter? The Matter** sayeth not.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out of the way, he observed the men . . . or several of them: there were not many . . . he observed some of the men pidling and skytting as they plied and strained. Probably much of this was the effect of fright or sheer terror and not a coincidentally simultaneous working of their bowels and bladders; because such a situation was always possible, and had been *ere Ajax burned the Argive ships,* only to be himself *spitted on the spiney rock*, the rowers always rowed naked or half-naked. It was not a pleasant sight, and certainly not a pleasant thought; his own thoughts began to turn away from the present: avoidance: but why were they now of a sudden turned to a far away and long ago scene in a smokey hut on a distant island? An old man was dying in the hut . . . had been dying . . . there, and from his own scant store Vergil knowing well that "Against death there grows no simple," had for no simple sought: some drops of a soothing medicament he had found, the one which banished sorrow and abolished pain: a few turbid drops. . . ah, but like the river of Hermus, was it not turbid with gold? . . . of the fluid of the scarlet fig. The old man was an ox-thrall: a thrall came with every ten yoke of oxen; such was the custom which had almost the force of law . . . perhaps it *was* law . . . what *was* law? *Utmost antiquity is the first principle of the law.* Or so the lawyers always said; he himself had been a lawyer. Once. Briefly. The old man with his gnarled limbs was an antiquity himself. A lifetime he had toiled with the oxen.

The sounds and sights of the present—the blustering of the wind, the scraping . . . creaking . . . knocking . . . of the oars, the shouted threats (of his own men there came little sound, of an inner knowledge they knew better than to waste their breath), the splashing of the spume and spray—all had dimmed off along with the sights. There was not much vision in the island hut, some light from the part-open door and some broken slats and patches of it through the broken walls, from a few embers in the fire where the bitter root of an ancient olive tree smouldered with a bitter reek. The old man muttered broken words. Vergil did not ask him to repeat, why bother, what did it matter, the old ox-thrall had but a few breaths left; but, feeling that he should say *some*thing, for the mastery of the balance demanded it, said, ambiguously—even in the face of duty-bound death we children of the bloody womb bumble and mumble—said, "I am doing what I can for you." A soft grunt from the dying serf, breath not so labored now, a long moment came and went; then the old ox-thrall's voice, much less thick and troubled, quite coherent and clear, saying, "And I shall do what I can for *you,* Ser Doctor. I shall give thee what I can. It may have valley some day. Tis a good curse—"

"A curse!" Odd favored gift indeed!

"Aye, a good 'un, 'tis. Which I gat of my good gaffer on the great isle

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Negroponty. A champion curse on red oxen. As it work only on *red* oxen, no one know why, Nature have great sport with we, may'ap she provide other curses on white, black, brindle, spotted. . . ." Red oxen were favored; *blood*-oxen they were called.

A sudden shift of tone apprised Vergil that the curse-chant had begun: it was no hard task to listen. Nor to remember.

"Blood-ox, blood-ox, do thou dwindle.
Spin, Norn, spin, Norn, may the thread kindle!
Twist it dire, twist it dire, e'en with thy spindle.
Blood-ox, blood-ox: quench its blood's fire."

The old slave's breath wavered, waited, halted, resumed. Chanted:

"Red ox, murrain, pox, shalt thou expire.
Horn, hair, and hide, cease to abide . . ."

The old man's voice moved to the level tone of conversation. He said, "This curse, which I gat of my *good* gaffer, back there in the great isle of Negroponty, I used me to get revenge on more nor one cruel master, and they knew it not. And all you needs to work it with is a scarp of red ox-hide, a—" His breath rattled, a look of slight surprise came onto his face, and death closed his eyes. A line of ichor oozed from his still-open mouth. Suddenly his nostrils, thatched with clotted grey hairs, seemed grown very wide.

But there was no wide window of escape now, at sea.

Had the ancient been going to add something? Was that last syllable not *and*? One would never know, now. Nor did it matter. Vergil had work to do; scarce had he reached the mid-point of gathering herbs on that far-distant island and comparing them with the illustrations in the *Theophrast on Plants;* the text he'd had of the illustrated MS, he strongly suspected of being at least a copy of a copy, and as filled with errors as a pomegranate is with pips. Enough time—

He rose, there in the hut, and absently brushed his trews, chaff and straw had clung there, spider's webs and eggs, flecks of dried dung had hung there, husks of barley, and one blade of green grass. There was no need for the familiar tests of mirror and feather; no one cared in the least. Tomorrow would do for burial, and if the old man were not indeed dead (which, indeed, he was), surely he would be by then.

An old ox-thrall.

Then the scene vanished as mist dissolved by the wind—though the wind had not dissolved *this* mist—he was back on the small "free" craft flying from the Carthage corsair. He heard the labored breaths of the rowers; only the steersman at the rudder had breath to spare, and he spoke but one sentence: *"Holy King Poseidon who rules the Realm Sea save us from death:"* and he spoke it again and again. And the ship's master walked up and down, to and fro, back and forth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A sting of spray near blinded Vergil in one eye. The pursuer was nearer now, one could bear the *Cry of Carthage*—war-cry, cry of triumph: the *Cry* of Carthage: "*Juno! Juno! Juno!*"

All at once he was on his knees, in his hand the leather square with the SQPR, *Senatusque Populusque Romanus,** Senate and Populus of Rome, stamped upon it . . . once . . . in gilt. It was all faded enough now, faded, worn, and greasy: but it was a by-word what color it had been—"*He* hath the hide of the red ox, *he* hath!"—in other words, the *He* was a citizen, and not a mere denizen and subject, of Rome; not alone of Yellow Rome, the City, but of the entire Empiry of Rome, which had chosen the color of Mars, godly Father of Father Romulus, father-founder of Rome, for this sole usage; Vergil was on his knees, he was chanting the curse upon the red ox—upon? *against*? why? well . . . they would soon see. They would see.

Blood-ox, blood-ox, do thou dwindle!

Spin, Norn, spin, Norn, may the thread kindle!

And *why,* in the name of any god or goddess or spirit or genii, was he, in the midst of the wild wide sea, cursing an *ox*?—not to stop, not to pause, his right thumb prickled, was that not enough?

Twist it dire, twist it dire, e'en with thy spindle!

Spindle made, it was said, of a dead man's rib-bone boiled in vinegar, making it supple and limber so the shape be changed: a thing fit for the Norns, those Northish ones whose name had been brought south by the Varangian guards to Mickelgarth, as they called Byzance-town; and why should the Norns not spin the threads of fate for the oxen of the isles if their attention was called thereto? Summoned thereto. . . .

The toiling crew looked at him out of the corners of their eyes, their arm, leg, and back muscles looking like cables strained so that they might crack and snap any moment now; but out of those eyes' corners shone some faint lust of hope, to see the magus on his knees; hope, despite the loudening clamor of *Juno! Juno! Juno!*; and, intrusively there was coming the line from The Oracles of Maro, ah, yes: *much loved by Juno, ancient Carthage, stained with purple, and heavy with gold. . . .*

Blood-ox, blood-ox; quench its blood's fire!

Red ox, murrain, pox, shalt thou expire!

Hair, horn, and hide: cease to abide!

Now! There would happen—

Nothing happened. Except of course—

"*Juno! Juno!*"

And the ship of Carthage drew steadily nigher.

*SQPR: Senatus*que* Populus*que* Romanus. Numa would have it so. And against *Numa* durst no pedagogue pout his tongue. So **The Matter** sayeth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Either the Curse was, for whatever reason (including, possibly, a lie: even dying men sometimes lie, alas: sometimes even dead men lie, . . . alas . . .), futile—or, somewhere, a hundred parasangs away, a blood-red ox with shambling gait, lurching and straining in the furrow of the loamy earth, had of a sudden stumbled: an ox-horn, grass-tied or not, plowing of a sudden, a furrow of its own—and, if so, what good? On the ship's sodden deck lay a blade of sodden grass, a leaf of common green grass, as to which the *Theophrast* said nothing: from Abana balm to Zenobian thistle the *Theophrast* had much to say: about the common bladed grass: nothing. On his knee, where it had knelt beside the old dying ox-thrall, a leaf: greeny grass.

Vergil thought again of the tenth and twelfth lines (eleventh was blotted and rubbed) of the viith book of *Concerning Things Seen in the Summer,* the provenance of which remains unknown, videlixet, *Against all Cities of the World may Carthage hope to triumph, save that against Grand Babylone may Carthage lift no Thing of Bronze nor Iron. And doth Carthage know this well. . . . Anent that Soldane of Babylone which did eat Grass like ane Ox, a further Accompt is given. . . .* The blade of green and common grass which lay upon the deck, scanty deckling that there was in all that scanty hollow ship, idly that morning before leaving land he had carelessly plucked the leaf and in his hat had thrust it; forgotten, it had fallen from his hat, here it was. He imagined just such a thing falling from an ox's muzzle—*why* had the Babylonian monarch eaten grass like an ox?—some day he hoped to know—and he conjectured vision that the ox was red. And simultaneously he concentrated on the words of the Emperor Julius II, *festina* (he'd said) *lente.* Hasten slowly. Lentor inexorable. With very careful fingers indeed Vergil clove the leaf of grass in two, let fall the half with the rib, placed the other half sideways in the hollow formed by the apposition of his thumbs, carefully brought the arrangement to his lips: and blew. A squeak, a squawk, a sharp sound, then a quite different noise—as loud as the arm of a ballista or some other catapult, suddenly free from tension, striking its bar the instant before the missile was flung forth.

Every braided-leather rope holding the vast sail and heavy mast of the vasty ship broke, flew frazzled and writhing, dissolved, vanished. The mast was down, cracking planks and timbers. The sail flopped flapping every which way, uncontrolled, uncontrollable, useless: *down.*

The Carthage ship floundered in the trough between two huge waves; and the tiny galley, with its tiny sail (intact, the weakling rushy ropes: papyrus: iris), crawled up the inner surface of the greater wave like an insect; climbed, clambered over its top, flowed down the other side. The mists closed in again, as cold and impartial as they had opened, and from within the mists came an echo of ever-dwindling cries: "*Juno! Juno!*"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But it was not now the voice of them that triumph, the sound of them that feast.

The rowers rolled their eyes to the captain; he gestured. The oars on one side went up and for the next stroke did not come down, the oars on the other side went *stroke!,* the small ship swerved on an angle; then both banks of oars played again, but more slowly. The speed was reduced, but so was the sound of the oars: an important consideration when the heavier atoms of the fog carried sound faster. "Right along the rhumb-lines," the captain directed the helmsman, showing him the cartolan with the winds going criss-cross from here to you: as though any wind might be directed to follow a line like a pullet in a spell: they were lines of probability, and no more. After no more than a blink or two the helmsman nodded. No ship might follow a map in a mist; in his mind, he followed, and turned his helm. The captain bore away the chart, and—with a deep bow and a gesture to Vergil—began his sempiternal striding up and down the deck, up and down, again and again. Back and forth.

The man at the helm may . . . say: *should* . . . have been returning his thanks to Holy King Poseidon who rules the Realm Sea. But if so, he was not doing so aloud. Perhaps in his mind, if he had room in his mind.

Between the rudder and the mast, Vergil, excused from every duty on the rota of duties, had now time to think of the duty which he had of late performed, and which was on no roster at all. As a woman, a matron, likely, who wished to summon a servant in the night time when all are at slumber save she herself, does so with a sound both still yet sharp, by clicking her fingernails; so Vergil stood, feet spread apart and braced and facing the grim grey sea, reviewed the elements of the equation of the spell: and did it not seem as though each element appeared as though summoned? click after click?

Fist, *click!* there was the need that the Carthage sail-ropes and mast-shrouds all be of leather, and not of any grass. *Click!* Then—what the odds that the leather be made from the hide of a *red* ox? for be sure they would not be made of cow-hide; though stern enough for any pair of boots or whip of thongs, no hide of whip and boots, however punished and punishing, would be stern enough for a ship's shrouds or sheets—its ropes or cables, in landmen's talk—And then the curse itself must be remembered and recited: recited accurately, too. *Click! Click! Click!* Next, the memory of Babylone and a blade of grass—absent from the instructions—the old ox-thrall, it was now clear, had died before divulging this about the blade of grass; yet, sure, it had been his intention to divulge it, and therefore it hung in the air and Vergil had breathed it in (else, it had passed into the Universal Æther, and thence had slipped into Vergil's mind, and, thence, his lips and fingers: Click!) That badge

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had now disolved. Once had Vergil pronounced the curse, and nothing had happened. It had also been needful that, *Click!* he should have with him a piece of the hide of a red ox. *Click!* and would he have had this, for certain, had he not been a citizen of Rome (Yellow Rome! Yellow Rome! but for all that, the stamp of the citizenship was on *red*) . . . ? *Click!* And what of the blade of grass, so common a thing as a leaf of grass, yet a thing extending, as it were, the protection of distance, far-distant Babylone (where Kings ate grass and books were made of mud . . . had not *Huldah* shown him?) over not-so-distant Carthage—*had* Carthage been destroyed? Cartha Gedasha, New City, springing up ever anew. . . . How had he, Vergil, merely "chanced" to put a blade of common grass into his hat, just e'er they'd left land that morning? Had not the Curse known it was to be required that day, and had it not *required* Vergil to take and pluck, to pluck and take? *Click!*

Click!

Pluck!

Click!

Next, *what* was the sounding of the shrill note upon the broken blade of grass, but what the alchemists called *The Dissolution,* the vanishing, or the appearance, of one substance in another, or the creation therein of a third?—the *katalysein,* as the Ægyptian occamists called it in their fluent, but to tell the truth untinctured, rather sloppy Greek . . . ? this was not the place nor time to parse or purify it.—had he not blown his grassy note, shrill as any wind, would all the elements of the equation have come together, and fulfilled the Curse on the Red Ox, *hair, horn, and hide . . . hide . . . ?*

Click!

Never before in his life had he had more instant and more emphatic evidence and proof of Illyriodorus' principle: "*In verbis et in herbis,* there lies power."

He felt like someone who had been long preparing for a certain journey, and who suddenly found himself on the road itself with nothing which had been in the catalogue of things needed for it—indeed, with not even the list itself: But if he had only the memory of the catalogue or list—was this *nothing for the journey?* far from it. It was, indeed, "*something for the journey,*" indeed. "Such and such a herb, sure against elf-shot," thunder-thistle, perhaps, had it not—but if the awareness of not having it kept him cautiously away from "blasted oaks" (what brought now to his mind the bidens, the lightning-blasted lamb?) "and all such sites of baleful omen and of elf-shot," why, wasn't this as though he *had* it? And better than though he had, and had not sense to use it?

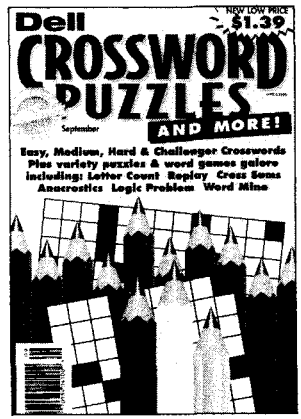
Click!

An old ox-thrall. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLUE: **IT WILL TANTALIZE AND CHALLENGE YOU EVERY MONTH**

ANSWER: **DELL CROSSWORD PUZZLES**



Each issue is packed with Crossword Puzzles from easy to challenger; Variety Puzzles such as Cross Sums, Anacrostics, Kriss Krosses and much more!

Subscribe today!

- ❑ Yes, send me 24 issues for only $29.94.
- ❑ Send me 12 issues for $15.97.
- ❑ Payment enclosed. ❑ Bill me.

CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-234-2402

or

Mail to: Dell Magazines, PO Box 55079, Boulder CO 80322

Name_____

Address_____

City/St/Zip_____

Please allow four to six weeks for your first issue. Outside U.S. and Poss. add $3.00 per year. U.S. funds only. 5IAF2

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tony Daniel

ACONCAGUA

Last year, the Writing Today Writers' Conference —held annually at Birmingham Southern College in Alabama—presented the prestigious T. Morris Hackney Literary Award and a check for $2000 to Tony Daniel for his novel, *Ascension*. This book has the same setting as "Aconcagua," Mr. Daniel's breathtaking new SF tale about scaling the Western Hemisphere's highest mountain. This story does contain a brief scene which may be disquieting for some.

art: Steve Cavallo

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I approached the Antarctic peninsula on a southeastern tangent, working in and out of storms. After several weeks, whipping snow replaced rain squalls. I ran them undercanvassed, awed by the fierce, incessant blast of wind, like a steady breath from a giant skull. All I had out were storm trysail and storm jib, but Approach crashed along far above her official hull speed. If I were racing against anyone but myself, I would have won.

—from "Still Life at the Bottom of the World," by Jeremiah Fall

The drive up the Andean highway was pleasantly frigid, and Jeremiah Fall's new filling was smooth under his tongue. It felt good to get away from the chilly desert clime of Mendoza to the truly cold high places. Gil Parra, a local *Andinista,* drove, and Jeremiah sat in the passenger's seat, listening to him sing horrible Argentine folk ballads.

They were in Parra's Citroën, a car which always looked to Jeremiah like a Volkswagen that had been crunched longways between two semis. The little automobile could go practically anywhere, Parra claimed, and proved it by taking it many miles down the snow-covered mule trail which left the main road near Puente del Inca. The drive completely terrified Jeremiah. Argentinians did not share the same consensus reality with Americans when it came to driving, he had long ago decided. In the Argentine driving universe, stop signs meant "speed up and beat the other guy through the intersection," and hazardous road conditions were obstructions brought about by tidal wave or earthquake—everything else was *no problema, eh*? ¡*Sí*. ¡*Ay caramba! Sí*.

The only other human being they saw on the way was a shivering private standing outside of the army checkpoint. The Argentine military permeated the country like a bad case of rash on a dog. Police and military roadblocks and checkpoints were a daily way of life. Jeremiah found it both annoying and sinister. They always asked you your destination and your business. What possible reason could they want to know such a thing, and how could they check to see if you were telling the truth anyway? What it came down to was that they were trying to intimidate the citizens, let the people know who was *really* in charge and who could pull the rug out from under the democracy at any time they wished. Jeremiah made it a habit to answer all questions asked by police or military with a lie.

Today, however, the private was obviously a poor kid far from home. He couldn't have been much over eighteen, and as he leaned into the Citroën and asked them where they were going, he was shaking so badly that Jeremiah was terrified that he'd accidently pull the trigger on the machine gun he had strapped over his shoulder and discharge a few

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rounds into two innocent mountain climbers. Parra handled the situation quickly and well, however. He slipped the poor kid a little money in the bargain, and promised to carry a letter to the boy's parents on their way back out. As they drove away, Jeremiah noticed that the private was not wearing any socks.

"They make them provide their own," Parra answered when he commented on the fact. "It's part of their conscription duties. If they don't have any, they don't have any," he said, and shrugged. The shrug was the universal method used in Argentina to comment on the government's inanities. That, and the ubiquitous grafitti.

After another five miles or so—Jeremiah had tried to break the habit of always thinking in miles instead of kilometers, feet instead of meters, but never could—the trail became truly impassible. Snow had avalanched down the steep banks of the valley they were driving along and sealed off the way. Parra found a relatively level and sheltered place to park, and they got their equipment out and strapped on their snowshoes. It would be a long, long approach hike in to the mountain. Most of the people who attempted Aconcagua in the summer hired a team of mules and a guide to take their stuff on the two day trip to the base camp at Plaza de Mulas. No guides worked in winter, and besides, a mule could gain no footing in the snow they would have to walk through. Parra had climbed the mountain over ten times, however—though never before in winter—and knew the way well.

They walked diagonally up the side of the valley for a ways, hoping to reach a plateau that Parra knew to be a few hundred feet up, and so avoid the danger of an avalanche that continuing down the bottom of the valley would bring. Jeremiah couldn't see the Vacas river, which ran below, under a thick layer of snow and ice, but he could make out its meander by the shape of the valley floor. He imagined it twisting and turning in dark and secret tunnels down through the valley. Had anyone ever tried to run a snow-caved river with a kayak? But this one would be impossible, it was little more than a creek. He'd save that idea for later, when he got old and would have to let the elements do most of the work.

After a half hour of climbing, they reached the plateau, and, after that, the walking became much easier. The plateau was flat for a couple of hundred feet from its edge to where it met the rising valley walls. It was very much like a step cut into the side of the valley by some giant race of gods. Maybe the same ones who'd created the Incas? Jeremiah thanked whatever process it was that had led to the easier going. Still, his pack weighed nearly a hundred pounds, and he was feeling the first effects of the altitude. This always happened to him: a day of intense mountain sickness, after which the thin air would not bother him at all. At least

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he'd kept in decent shape, running every day while he'd lived in Mendoza. Many times his route would take him up to see old San Martín, and the grotesque obelisk which marked his crossing of the Andes.

In winter, Mendoza clung to the *cerros* like lint, like a fungal infection. Low ceilings, low spirits, low *everything*. For months, Jeremiah had longed for high places, but all he'd had was a room on the third floor of an old hotel that had been converted into efficiency apartments. These were rented out to rich tourists from Buenos Aires in the summer. In the winter, he paid a cheap rate. Third floor rooms were the cheapest, because they would be the first to collapse when the next big quake hit.

Earthquakes were a way of life in this city. If you didn't like some piece of architecture, stick around for a few years and it would get shaken down to its foundations. There was still rubble poking through the irrigated shrubbery from the one that had hit a few years ago. Many killed, forty thousand people homeless.

Yet Mendoza was not a city that made one think of death. Mendoza was, instead, fine wine (okay, *wine* anyway, at least) and thin doñas in high heels. You could get good and bloody *chorizos* here, with mustard that would reanimate a week-old corpse and sauerkraut that could serve as an astringent in a medical emergency.

He also had the highest view in town, such as it was, because, due to the earthquakes, no building was *over* three stories in Mendoza. Only old General San Martín on the top of *Cerro de la Gloria* had a better view. Jeremiah had spent hours in his apartment, gazing down the Calle 25 de Mayo over the bare sycamores which lined the street to the Andes beyond. Or making love to Ánalia, his *Andinista* dentist with the perfect, white teeth.

Two days ago, he'd had no idea he would be here, with Parra, on the way up Aconcagua. Sure, he'd intended to climb Aconcagua *sometime*. But life in Mendoza had been . . . not easy . . . *settled*. After the special hell of Vinson, Mendoza was, if not Heaven, then, at least, Limbo. Limbo just before the Judgment Day. Before the earthquake.

Up here, there were no trees at all. This side of the Andes was a high desert. That made the approach easier on the feet, but harder on the soul for Jeremiah. He did love trees. He loved to be *above* them, looking down at the texture they gave to the mountains. The sky was clear, but the wind was shifting and unsteady. More than once, Parra stopped short and looked around, sensing something in the air that he did not like. When Jeremiah asked him what it was, he could not say. "Maybe a storm. I don't know. Nothing." And they walked on. And on.

It was late winter, but the days were still very short. They were on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the wrong side of the range for lingering sunsets. When the sun dipped below the western peaks, the air became leaden with cold. Nevertheless, Jeremiah and Parra decided to push to the base camp, and donned headlamps so that they could see as they walked. Jeremiah liked to hike at night in the winter, for the colder temperatures froze the snow fast and made avalanches less likely. But they couldn't depend on that. And they couldn't be certain that a massive avalanche wouldn't sweep them off the plateau and into the valley below, to lie buried under snow until spring, then to become fertilizer for wreaths of wildflowers.

I might not mind ending like that, Jeremiah thought, and, despite its morbidness, the idea comforted him. He felt chilly, but strong. The cold, however, was getting to Parra. Once or twice he stumbled, but insisted that they press onward. The moon came up, nearly full, and the snow shone boney blue, as if it were capillaried with blue-tinted oxygenated blood. All along, they were steadily climbing. Jeremiah's head began to pound and his bowels felt loose and weak. He knew the symptoms, and knew that there was little to be done except drink lots of water and endure. After about two hours of snow-shoeing in the darkness, they came to the Plaza de Mulas, the base camp. They had reached 13,700 feet.

Parra flung his pack to the ground and sat with his head on his knees. Jeremiah patted him on the shoulder and began to set up camp. He got out the tent; it was Parra's, but Jeremiah had used many like it. He took the shock-corded poles and flung them out onto the snow. He always enjoyed how this seemingly random, energetic action was the exact technique for getting the separate pole sections to slide into the broadened fitting of the section next to it. The shock-cord kept the sections together and lined them up. Then Jeremiah shook the poles and all the pole sections clicked into place, forming long, pliant ribs for the tent. Next, Jeremiah leveled out a spot of snow and laid a sheet of plastic over it. The plastic would be under the tent, and would provide further protection and waterproofing for their floor. He threaded the pole-ribs through sleeves in the tent and notched them into holes on the tent's four sides. When he was done, the tent stood domed and taut. He picked it up and placed it on the plastic ground sheet. Next, he jammed their ice axes and ice tools into the snow, and anchored the four corners of the waterproof fly, which covered the tent, to the axes. He stood back and looked over his handiwork with pleasure. He loved tents, loved their smallness and coziness. A tent was all that was *necessary* for human shelter. All else, he often felt, was ostentation.

Jeremiah's apartment in Mendoza had been about the size of a tent, and a medium-sized one at that. Maybe that was part of the reason he'd

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

felt so comfortable there, so reluctant to leave, to get on with things. That, and Ánalia. Just before he'd seen her for the last time, he'd torn himself from the small window—from gazing out in Aconcagua's general direction—and spent a half hour trying to get the apartment into some kind of presentable shape.

Papers cascaded from the brick-and-board desk like a calving glacier. He hesitated to touch them. The avalanche danger was great, and he could fall into one of those crevasses between the pages and never hit bottom.

Still, he thought that he should make it *seem* to Ánalia that he had been writing today. You should finish your book, she'd told him. If you finish your book on your Antarctic trip, I will trust you to pay me for that silver filling. That was how he'd met her. A cavity. At thirty-three years old. In Argentina. After he'd spent his last precious unconverted dollars on new, necessary climbing rope.

When he'd gotten the paper somewhat under control, he'd sat staring at his typewriter—*her* typewriter—thinking about Antarctica. Trying to think about the bottom of the world. But nothing came. Yet surely he could get together five hundred words to show Ánalia. She couldn't read English anyway. If it were bad, he could tell her it had lost something in the translation. He had to write soon, anyway, because he needed to buy supplies. He'd spent the last of his advance money getting back from the Antarctic and getting settled in Mendoza. The climbing equipment wouldn't be a problem; he'd made sufficient friends within the local *Andinistas,* the climbing community, to beg or borrow what he would need. He already had his ax, his boots, and his crampons. He had his down sleeping bag, still salt-caked, his pack, his parka, a stove, long underwear, and windpants. He would need to buy food, though, and fuel bottles. The *Andinistas* had some sort of weird reluctance to loan out fuel bottles. He never should have given his own bottles to the guys at Palmer. I am entirely too generous, Jeremiah thought. Charlie Worth, his old climbing partner, had told him that many times, but he'd never taken it to heart. Jeremiah resolved to become more acquisitive.

He'd like to start by acquiring Ánalia for the entire afternoon. He knew she'd only committed to staying with him during siesta, but Jeremiah surveyed his current needs and found that three hours would not be enough. Yet there was little that he had left to barter with. His promises were meaning less and less to Ánalia, of that he was sure. It was funny how women trusted him so completely when they first met him, then gradually lost faith. The opposite should be the case. Why did it always come down to either keeping his promises to himself or keeping them to other people? Were love and a meaningful life mutually exclusive in the long run? For a moment, he saw the face of Mandy Asterwood in his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mind's eye. His *other* climbing partner. The dead one. Her happy, wind-burned face, smiled at him. Just before she fell three thousand feet. Stop it.

Traveling *and* women. Traveling *or* women. Which was the correct logical operand?

There was nothing to write today, and he wanted Ánalia desperately. Women. On a gloomy day like today, he would choose a woman over anything. He stared at the blank paper in his typewriter until Ánalia knocked at his door.

He opened it, and, once again, was struck by how stunning she was. Ánalia was dark for an Argentinan. This country was populated with European stock, and it constantly surprised Jeremiah to hear Spanish coming out of the mouths of the fair and blonde. But Ánalia's parents had been Uruguayan immigrants, and there was Indian in her blood. She was honey-tan, after the fashion of Polynesian women, with jet black hair and obsidian eyes. Today she was all in white, down to her white shoes. Most Argentinians dressed like sleazy Assembly of God clergy, as far as he had seen. But Ánalia was far from being a country preacher's wife.

She was smart and quick, as a woman had to be in this country of male-dominated profession. Yet she was kind. She was used to making tiny moves which hurt her patients as little as possible, and that attitude carried over into her relationship with Jeremiah. He appreciated her gentleness, even when she was probing.

Ánalia giggled as he pulled her toward him. "Do I smell like teeth?" she asked, because he'd once made an off-handed comment about that certain smell that dental offices had. Today she had on a trace of subtle perfume.

"Jaguar teeth," he said and kissed her neck. "Grizzly bear teeth, shark teeth." A kiss for each. "Giraffe teeth."

"Giraffe teeth?" She drew back playfully. "I brought you something, Jeremiah." She always pronounced the "J" as "Dj." He liked that. Djeremaya was the name of a much mellower man than Jeremiah, certainly not a man who could pronounce doom on Israel.

"What is it?" he said. He hoped it was nothing expensive, for which he would feel a debt to her.

She reached into her purse—an off-white purse to accent her outfit, he supposed—and pulled out a small package. She handed it to him, and he started to rip off the wrapping paper.

"Careful," Ánalia said. He unwrapped it more slowly.

It was exquisite. A wooden frame surrounded a mountain scene which was formed and colored by the iridescent wings of butterflies. It fitted neatly into the palm of his hand. As he turned it into the light, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

overlapping scaly hills flashed and shimmered, as if the mountains were aglow with spring wildflowers.

"That big purple one in the back is Aconcagua," Ánalia said. "How do you like it?"

"I like it very much," he said. "It's amazing. How do they do this?"

"I don't know. They are very inexpensive, though. I have several myself."

He set the butterfly mosaic down on his desk and pulled Ánalia close. "Thank you," he said, and kissed her. They kissed hard and deep. Her teeth felt like curved porcelain under his tongue.

Parra climbed wearily inside the tent and dragged his non-pointy equipment along with him, but Jeremiah lingered outside. He got out his camp stove and attached the fuel line to one of Parra's fuel bottles, into which he'd put his stove's pump assembly. He gave the pump a few strokes, then lit the stove. He let it warm a moment and build the natural flow pressure out of the fuel bottle, then set some snow upon it inside a moistened stainless steel pan. The snow began to sizzle and steam. While it was melting, Jeremiah gazed up at the moon.

It was stark white this evening, a bunched, hard stone in the sky. I'd like to climb *that,* Jeremiah thought. On a small, self-contained expedition, bringing nothing but himself, leaving no trace of his passing. The moonshots were so wasteful and bottom-heavy. They were bureaucratic ladders to the sky. Like the siege tactics of expedition mountaineering—necessary perhaps, but ugly, unsymmetric. An alpine expedition to the moon. Now there was an idea! But not even Charlie Worth had the funding for *that* one.

Charlie *did* have the funding for Everest, however, the next lowest solid matter. There was money enough. Was there time? Jeremiah looked into the sky, feeling his smallness, his inconsequence. I am thirty-five. I will be thirty-six by summer. Was he too old for Everest? No. People over fifty had climbed it. But they had struggled up, and the climb had nearly done them in. Up above, the Southern Cross hung mournful in the sky, with the Magellanic Clouds smeared across its crosspieces like shining blood.

What it came down to was endurance and will.

And the ability to face the ghosts of those who had died on the two previous attempts he'd been a part of. The chance that it would happen again. Death at the bottom of a three thousand foot scream. Jeremiah shuddered.

The wind whipped up and his snow sizzled faintly, and again Jeremiah was a lone man under a big, black sky. To the west was the blank west face of Aconcagua, glowing an impassive white. It seemed possible that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he could question the mountain, the old Inca-god, and get some sort of response, some sort of direction. But Jeremiah knew from long experience that the mountains did not answer. Or at least they did not answer *directly*. Like God. After all these years, he still believed. But he knew better than to pray. After a while, Jeremiah made tea for himself and took a cup in to Parra.

When he got inside the tent, Jeremiah removed his plastic overboots, then the felt liners, wrapping them in a stuff sack. He rolled out his thermal pad and his down sleeping bag, and shoved the liners down to the sleeping bag's toe. He did not want them to freeze overnight and give him frostbite while he was climbing tomorrow. Then he climbed into the bag. It was very cold at first, but he'd brought warmth in with him, and the down retained most of what his body produced. Soon he was relatively comfortable. The bag smelled a bit moldy, a bit salty. He thought of Ánalia, in her small house on a narrow street in Mendoza. Ánalia, sleeping naked, brown among her white sheets. The wind flapped the tent. All tents were like this, everywhere. It was a separate universe he could crawl into, on any mountain on any continent. A cocoon, the stationary point around which all the relative world spun. Tents were a constant in his life.

He awoke before dawn and found that his headache had passed and his diarrhea was no longer a problem. He was over his altitude sickness, and well on the way to becoming acclimated. He'd had much the same experience in climbing Vinson in Antarctica, but there the diarrhea had been a special problem, because dropping his pants to relieve himself was a life-threatening maneuver in the cold. In the Himalayas, at much greater elevation, the mountain sickness had laid him up for two days, not merely with discomfort, but with exhaustion and unmoving muscles. He slept it off between fevers and vomiting, in a Sherpa's hut. Then, on the third day, he was just *well*. There was no gradual emergence; he walked out of the hut, up the trail, and joined the climbing party at base camp. By the next day, he was on the mountain.

So he was used to the altitude once more. Without disturbing Parra, Jeremiah slipped into his liners and boots—cold, but bearable—and went out to start breakfast. He would need to melt a lot of snow this morning. He needed to force himself to drink large amounts of water before he began the real climb. The eastern sky colored, and Jeremiah heard Parra stirring within the tent.

"Oatmeal's cooking," he called out, his voice a strange thing in the natural quiet.

"Nick's American Bar and Grill opens early these days," Parra said, with a laugh. It seemed that the tent was talking. "Where are my biscuits

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and *dulce de leche*, you stinking *norteamericano*?" After a moment, Parra stumbled out and held out his metal cup. Jeremiah filled it up with mush.

"Yvon Chouinard will not touch this stuff," Jeremiah said, wolfing down a big spoonful of his own.

"The great climber does not eat oatmeal?" Parra was incredulous.

"He got picked up for vagrancy when he was bumming out to Yosemite one time. Spent eighteen days on a work crew eating nothing but oatmeal once a day. Now he can't stand the taste of it."

Parra looked with compassion at Jeremiah. "You Yankees have it very tough when you are young, let me tell you."

"Don't call me a Yankee," Jeremiah said. "Don't ever call me *that*!"

"What are you then, amigo?"

Good question. Middle-class southern white boy who accidently ended up soloing the seven summits of the world? Well, five of them so far, anyway. And Everest would not be a solo, most likely. But he was digressing, as usual, avoiding the question.

"I don't know. But I'm *not* a Yankee."

They broke camp within an hour and started up the mountain. After snow-shoeing another mile, rocks began to poke through the snow, and then gravelly scree. Soon the snow became mixed with ice and scree entirely, and became too steep for snowshoes. They replaced them with crampons. Their weight was more concentrated over a smaller space now, and when there was no ice or rock to support them, they plunged hip-deep into the snow and had to plow forward. The process was very physical, and, while it was tiring, Jeremiah felt fine and strong. Parra began to lag behind. The day was very cold, and the wind stole away much of the warmth they generated. Jeremiah estimated the wind speed to be about fifteen knots. This worried him somewhat, for it could be an augur of storms. When they got to camp 1, he would ask Parra what he thought.

Suddenly, from behind him, there came the familiar, chilling roar that filled many a climber's nightmares. Avalanche! It was far to their right, but angling down the slope of the mountain toward them. Where was Parra? There. He was a dot, far below Jeremiah, almost hidden by some rocks. Jeremiah watched in horror as the avalanche's edge caught the rocks and sprayed upward over them, like breaking surf. It was not a large avalanche, but *any* avalanche was big enough to kill a man if it caught him just right. Parra was lost in the powder. Jeremiah turned around and ran down the slope in long strides, turning to either side as if he were skiing.

"Gil," he called out. "Gil Parra!"

"I'm here. I'm okay."

Parra had seen the avalanche coming and made a run for the rocks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which jutted out of the slope. He'd just made it to their lee side when the edge of the avalanche struck. He'd escaped with nothing worse than a dousing of snow.

"That scared the shit out of me!" he said.

"Me, too."

"I don't think it would have got me, even if I hadn't made it to the rocks," Parra said. He was gabbling in a high, nervous voice. "But it would have knocked me down. Maybe I would have broken something in the fall. Probably not."

Jeremiah agreed, but did not want to discuss the matter at the moment. Parra was badly shaken. He got out the stove and heated up some tea for Parra and himself. After drinking this, Parra seemed to calm down. They set out again. Jeremiah regulated his pace so that Parra could keep up.

The sun had already sunk behind the mountains when they reached camp 1. Chile, many miles on the other side of the rock and snow, was still bathed in light, but Mendoza would be turning on the streetlamps about now. Ánalia would be finishing up at her office. She always took a hot máte after work, the Argentine equivalent to the American South's iced tea—they drank it morning, noon, and night.

Two days ago, Ánalia had not been able to make a máte for her siesta. After kissing Jeremiah, she went to the hot plate in the apartment, but the water kettle, sitting nearby, was empty. The only source of water was the bathroom down the hall.

"I guess I will have to skip máte and get to the more important things," Ánalia said, dangling the kettle by one finger. It slipped off and clanged back onto the cold eye. She stared hard at Jeremiah with what must be deep longing—for few desires were strong enough to make an Argentinian give up her afternoon máte.

"Take a long siesta," he said. "I want you all afternoon."

"I have patients waiting already, Jeremiah."

He drew her toward him and took her purse from her, set it down, then began to undo her blouse. "I'm selfish today. Let them wait."

She laughed at this, but it was an uneasy laugh. Jeremiah finished with the blouse and it fell away. She moved to unbutton his shirt, but he stopped her. He wanted to take off her bra first. He loved the way women looked with only a skirt on. Ánalia, he corrected himself. I love the way *Ánalia* looks that way. He reached around and found the catch to her bra, and, with a rubbing motion, as if he were crushing an insect between his thumb and fingers, he undid it. Every time he did this, Ánalia would gasp. He suspected she was humoring him, but he liked even her false surprise.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How do you *do* that so well?" she asked. "I love the way you do that!"

Practice. That was the real answer, which, of course, he dare not utter. Instead, he took a nipple between his lips and licked the tip. She gently pulled away and backed up, knowing that he wanted a full view.

God, she was gorgeous. A flush under her tawny skin, crinkled nipples—brown almost to blackness. She wore no jewelry, which, when he'd first noticed, both surprised and pleased Jeremiah. Her white skirt made her skin seem even darker. She ran her long fingers over her chest, cupped a breast. Invitation enough.

What really rattled him down to his soul was this combination of European and Native American expressed in Ánalia—as if the races had re-blended to form the original Ur woman, the Earth goddess from the beginning. It was always women like this who moved him the deepest. Mandy was a sort of exception. Mandy with her perpetual mountain tan, but white as the driven snow under her long underwear. Yet still a mix of light and dark, the earth and air, in her personality. I loved her, Jeremiah thought. I love Ánalia.

After Ánalia had helped him undress, she unzipped and dropped her skirt, leaving only her curious white shoes. He knelt before her, hoping that she would take as worship what was really only a way of taking off the irritating shoes. When he stood up, he picked her up—he was pleased that his upper body strength hadn't completely deserted him since the summer—and took her toward his bed.

Or *not* the bed this time, he thought. As he walked, she wrapped her legs about his waist and, reaching down, guided him within her. He took her to the window, and leaned her back into the wall next to it. As he leaned into the wall, into Ánalia, he could see, in the corner of his eye, the distant Andes over the bare sycamores and squat buildings. He could not actually see Aconcagua from here, but he knew it was there, waiting. Frozen in place, waiting.

Let the mountain wait.

Ánalia wrapped her legs around his ass and pulled herself up and down his torso, spreading their sweat between them for a smooth slide, as if they both were covered with oil.

And then, of course, the phone rang.

He'd forgotten that he even *had* one. The ringing filled the little room with a loud insistency. Jesus Christ, where was it? Ánalia realized at the same time as Jeremiah did that there was no ignoring the sound. He eased back and she put her feet onto the floor. He pulled himself from her reluctantly, and the damn phone kept up its shrill buzz. Where the hell did the sound *come* from? He began to search the room, and Ánalia laughed at him jumping about bewildered and stark naked.

Finally, Jeremiah found the telephone under a layer of paper and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

extricated it with an effort. He couldn't remember anybody *ever* calling him since he'd moved in here. He wasn't in the habit of giving out his number to local people he met, and he'd told his parents only to use the number in an emergency. He wasn't sure if he'd given it to Ánalia, even. But then, she lived nearby, and physical contact was so much more enjoyable.

"Hola?"

"Don't you 'hola' me, you piece of white trash from Alabama!"

"Charlie!" he said. It wasn't a question.

"How the hell *are* you, Jeremiah Fall?" Charlie Worth sounded drunk. Or at least extremely happy.

"I'm doing okay."

"Great, great." Charlie was silent, coy even. Strange. Charlie Worth was a Texan, one of the most confident climbers Jeremiah had ever met, and a big-time financier to boot.

"What do you want, Charlie?" Jeremiah went over to the bed—the phone would barely reach—and sat down.

Again with the trace of coyness in his voice, Charlie said, "Why? Am I disturbing you?"

"Would I let you disturb me?" Jeremiah looked over at Ánalia. She was smiling, a bit nonplussed, since she could not understand the English he was speaking. "It's an old friend," he said in Spanish.

"Somebody there with you?" Charlie asked. "I should have known. But if I can't even call you in the middle of the *day* and not interrupt your fun, I don know *when* it would be possible!"

"It's okay, Charlie. What do you want?"

"You getting over climbing Vinson yet?" Charlie asked. After Jeremiah had gotten back from Antarctica, Charlie had been the first person he'd called to brag to.

"I'm getting there."

"Feel like doing some more climbing soon?"

"Could be. What's up?" What *was* up? Surely Charlie wasn't about to offer him a place on a climb. Hadn't Charlie quit for good after that horrible storm cost him most of a foot on Nanga Parbat?

"I was thinking about climbing Mount Everest, myself," Charlie said, deadpan. "I was wondering if you'd like to come along."

So, it was a joke he wasn't getting. Maybe he'd been away from the States for so long that American humor didn't make sense to him anymore.

"I'm serious as a heart attack," Charlie said, correctly interpreting Jeremiah's silence. "I want to climb Everest. I'm willing to pay large sums of money to be able to do so, and I'm asking you if you want to do it *with* me, Jeremiah Fall."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Right. Charlie Worth climb Everest. At forty, with one and half feet.

"Charlie, you may be biting off more than you can chew," Jeremiah said, trying to let his friend down easily.

"Don't patronize me, you son-of-bitch!" Charlie shot back. "You're as bad as that damn guide!"

"What damn guide?"

"I climbed the Eiger, Jeremiah. I said I'd never climb again, but I did it."

"*You* climbed the Eiger?"

"Hell *yes* I did! And I want *more*. Higher!"

"Don't you think you should try something intermediate? Like maybe K2 or something?"

"I mean it, Jeremiah," Charlie said. Jeremiah could tell he was getting agitated, getting into that excited-nervous funk which only Charlie could achieve with wince-producing perfection. "*Everest,* Jeremiah!"

Everest. Just the thought of her made Jeremiah shudder. He always thought of her that way, as female, as if she were a boat, with her high mast puncturing the stratosphere and trailing a great permanent plume like a masthead pendant. For the last ten years, she'd filled his dreams. And there was one dream, the bad one, which he would awaken from shuddering and sweaty. He and the other climbers he had known were clinging to the mountain like sailors clinging to the rigging, caught in a hurricane. Then the screams as one by one they lost their grips and fell into the miasma below. Finally, Jeremiah was the only one left. His hands were black with frostbite and he watched in horror as his fingers separated from his palms, oozing away like bananas squeezed in two. There was no way to hold on any longer, with only broadened stumps for hands. And Jeremiah fell. And fell. And *fell.*

Ánalia saw Jeremiah shake at the memory and came over to the bed and put her arms about him.

"What's got into you, Charlie?" he heard himself saying.

"I decided that it was *necessary* for me to climb it."

"*Why,* for Godsake?"

Charlie was quiet for a long time, and the line almost sounded dead. It was amazing how little static there was on it, considering the distance.

"I've asked *you* that same question a bunch of times, and you've never given *me* a satisfactory answer," Charlie finally said.

Well, he's got me there, Jeremiah thought. Everest. A third attempt. Up until now, he'd put the mountain out of his conscious mind. *Since Mandy fell and I couldn't catch her.* But Everest was always there, looming massively in his dreams, his nightmares, his desires.

"Just how are you planning to go *about* this little adventure?" Jeremiah asked. "You know we're talking three-quarters of a million to a million?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm prepared to invest whatever it takes. I have ten million which is relatively liquid, and I can get more if it's necessary. A lot more."

Ten million. Charlie's expert system interpreter was apparently selling very well. That solved *that* problem.

"There's permits," Jeremiah said weakly. "You know Nepal is hell on giving out permits, and there's no way you're talking about trying the Chinese side."

"No, I think Nepal is the way to go," said Charlie, sounding like a hard-headed businessman closing in on a deal. "There are several expeditions which have permits for next summer, I understand. I'll bet you know one of those expedition leaders, and that you could suggest to them that, ah, we could give them a good price for a chance to participate."

"Bribe our way onto a team?" It had been done. Climbers took funding where they could get it, and sometimes it came with extra human baggage.

Everest.

Jesus Christ, when Charlie dreamed big, he didn't have very many scruples about making his dreams come true. Jeremiah tried to remember who had permits for next year. The Japanese had a team. Akima was the leader. There was a Canadian-American effort out of Seattle, too.

I can't believe I'm even considering this, thought Jeremiah. I am a barbarian. No ethics. No *way*. No fucking way.

But *Everest.*

"You think about it, Jeremiah," said Charlie. "I'm ready to do this. I need your help or there's no way, though."

"I'm sure you could find some way to arrange it without me," Jeremiah replied.

"Maybe. But we climb well together. Have you ever thought that the reason you didn't make it up Everest those other times is because you didn't have *me* along?"

"*You* had retired. At least that's what you told me."

"Yeah, well, now I'm *un*retired."

Suddenly, the entire conversation was enormously funny to Jeremiah. He couldn't control himself, he was shaking with mirth. Ánalia held him tighter and caressed him. She probably thinks I'm in pain. Maybe she thinks someone has called to tell me that my parents died or something.

"Don't worry," he told her. "It's nothing. It's okay."

"Okay?" she whispered.

"Well, more or less."

"Hey, tell her howdy for me, whoever she is, won't you, Jeremiah," said Charlie.

"Uh huh."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And you *think* about this. This is my dream, Jeremiah. I need this, more than I've ever needed anything before. It's a matter of life and death for me."

"I see," said Jeremiah.

"I *mean* it."

"I know." And he *did*. He could tell Charlie Worth was not shitting him.

"Call me in a week," said Charlie. Then he hung up. Jeremiah stayed on the phone as the connections broke—U.S. to satellite to Buenos Aires to Mendoza—one by one. Click. Click. Click. Click.

He slowly hung up the phone. He found that he had lost his breath for a second and was breathing in quick gasps. The room smelled very much like sex.

"That was Charlie," he said. "My best friend and partner since I was twenty years old and climbed my first mountain." And then he told her the rest. After he finished, Ánalia was silent for a long time.

She pulled back a little bit. There was the tiniest crack between them, Jeremiah thought. Just big enough to jam in a finger for a good hold in rock climbing. But flesh was not rock. "Do you think you are going to do this?" she asked.

"I don't know."

"Then let me ask you another question. Do you think there is a place for *me* in this thing?"

The question he dreaded. The question he had been asked so many times, and had never known how to answer.

"I don't know that either."

"When are you going to know?"

"I have to decide what to do soon. There are many arrangements to be made."

"You have to climb Aconcagua very soon then."

"Yes."

"It can't wait for summer?"

"This summer, I will be in Nepal making preparations. It'll be winter there, of course. *If* I go."

"Who will go with you to Aconcagua?"

He looked at her long, hard, objectively. She was too soft. Not because she was a woman. Nothing of the sort. Because she wasn't *him*.

"Some *Andinista* I know. Gil Parra, probably. But I was thinking of soloing the summit."

"I couldn't make it?"

"No."

"You will go this week?"

"It would be best. Gil could go, as support."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That would probably be for the best," she said. The crack was widening. In space, in time.

"Then there is something I would like to tell you," Ánalia said.

"What? What is it?"

"You have another cavity developing. I saw it when I filled the other. I knew you didn't have any money, and silver is expensive."

"Ah."

"I will cancel my appointments this afternoon and fill it for you."

He looked at Ánalia closely then. She was crying softly, dabbing her eyes with the cover from his bed.

I cannot say why I decided to sail to Antarctica alone. I do know where and when I came up with the notion of climbing the Vinson Masif. I was working my way through the infamous Rock Band of Mt. Everest. This was my second trip to the mountain, and I had every hope of being on the summit team. Everest is not only the highest point on Planet Earth, it is—perhaps beside the point—the highest peak in Asia. I had already climbed McKinley—Denali it is also called—in Alaska, so I had North America's highest point under my belt. I thought that, after I finished the big one—Everest—I could go and do the rest in short order. This was not to be.

As we neared the summit of Everest, the team which was to establish the last camp before the top made a mistake. Nobody knows what the mistake was. Or maybe it was not a mistake. Maybe it was a pure accident. Accidents and mistakes have the same outcome in the Himalayas. One of the members of that team was a friend. A woman I had loved, and asked to marry me. In all, three people fell to their deaths, roped together physically, by fate, by the mistake of one team member. By the accidental callousness of the universe. Like ants on the sticky tongue of the anteater.

I found her body the next day, but it was too dangerous to carry her out. I knew she wouldn't have wanted me to risk it. After that, I went sailing for a long time. Some months later, I found myself in New Zealand.

—from "Still Life at the Bottom of the World"

For the first time, that night, Jeremiah took from his pack the little mountain scene made from butterfly wings which Ánalia had given him. In the light of the waxing moon, the colors were gone, but the texture was accented, so that the mountains looked furry, as if they were covered with great hordes of moths.

He and Parra set up the tent in the flattest place they could find, and partially buried it in snow, for the insulation. Jeremiah was not entirely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

happy about the location, though it did not look prone to avalanches. There was a gully off to the side a few hundred yards that the falling snow would most likely channel down if it *did* come in the night. Winter mountaineering was in every way a careful man's game.

After they'd burrowed into their sleeping bags, Jeremiah discussed the weather with Parra.

"I think there is a storm coming," Parra told him. "But I'm not sure when. We may have several days . . . I do not have so much experience in the winter here."

"Tomorrow we will climb to the Berlin hut."

"That is something I wanted to talk with you about, amigo," said Parra. "I'm beginning to think your solo idea is the best one."

They'd discussed it before. Jeremiah had done the other five highest continental peaks alone. Of course Kilimanjaro and Elbrus were merely long walks. And climbing Australia's Kosciusko was comparable to hiking up Cheaha, back in Alabama. Denali had been a bitch, though. He'd done that one in winter, also. But Jeremiah had never experienced hardship like he had on Vinson. After the sheer unmanning cold, the worst part was knowing that, even though there was a small contingent of well-wishers below in base camp, if he hurt himself, the nearest hospital was hundreds and hundreds of miles away—and the airplane came on schedule, period. Even if you were dying. That was the way it had to be in the Antarctic.

But Parra had been undecided about whether he wanted to make the winter ascent, and it *was* mostly Parra's equipment, after all. Jeremiah had decided to let the mountain take care of the decision. Apparently, it had done so, just as Jeremiah had expected.

"Do you want to stay here, or go down to Plaza de Mulas?" Jeremiah asked. "And are you sure?"

"Yes, I am sure," Parra said. "I am feeling bad luck for myself on this one. But it will be okay for me to stay here and keep some hot tea on for you."

Parra was making a brave gesture, and Jeremiah respected it. He could not have found a better person to come into the Andes with. Parra would be a perfect team member on Everest.

"Thank you, amigo," Jeremiah said. "When I come back down, I may have something to discuss with you."

"What?"

"A climb."

"Well, when you come back down, we will discuss it."

Jeremiah had difficulty sleeping that night. It was very cold, and he was going over his route again and again. He'd memorized a photograph of the winter west face of Aconcagua, but here on the mountain, there

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was no way to stand back and gain perspective on where he was. He'd need to be thoughtful as well as strong if he were to make it. They were at 16,200 feet. Nearly a half-mile above the tallest of the Rockies, Jeremiah reflected. Tomorrow would be real mountain climbing.

Parra woke Jeremiah up before dawn with a cup of tea and some oatmeal. They ate in silence. Jeremiah got out his pack, and, by the light of his headlamp, began to examine and discard anything he wouldn't need. A daypack to carry things in. The tent would stay. He'd have to carve out a snow cave, for the climb would require one or possibly two overnight bivouacs. But not having to carry the tent's weight was an acceptable tradeoff. He would not need rope. Rope was what you used when you went with a partner. It was *why* you went with a partner. Safety. No rope. An ice ax, and a shorter tool. Stove, fuel, and food. Camera. Sunglasses. He had on long underwear, synthetic fleece pants and jacket, a toboggan on his head. Heavy woolen socks. Wind pants over the fleece pants. A down parka. A parka shell. Gaiters over his boots. Crampons. Silk undergloves. Wool gloves. Nylon overmitts to keep away the frostbiting wind.

I am an astronaut, Jeremiah thought. All I need is a jet backpack. That *would* make the whole thing simpler, wouldn't it? He slung his daypack into position. It was very much lighter. Maybe forty pounds. He could barely feel it.

"Go with God," said Parra. Jeremiah shook Parra's hand, then began climbing the mountain. The going was easy at first. The snow surface was hard-frozen overnight, and his crampons gripped it with precision. He felt fine, very strong. As the sun came up, Jeremiah began to sing. It was an old Eagles tune from his college days, "Peaceful, Easy Feeling." Charlie had liked that one, too. They'd nearly worn it out on the Walkman they'd carried on their bumming trip in the Chamonix valley, when they'd done three peaks a day for a week. As the day went on, he continued to make good time. Yet the summit looked no nearer. Jeremiah began to fall into a sort of trance, but an alert trance. He carefully cramponed up the moderate slope, using classic single-ax technique expertly and unconsciously. His short ax was lashed to his daypack.

As the sun moved higher overhead, the snow's surface began to weaken. Jeremiah found himself slogging through deep drifts, sometimes up to his shoulders. The climbing was grueling, and he only made a few hundred feet an hour. The altitude also began to take its toll. No matter how good the condition he was in, there were built-in limits to what the human body could do, without proper oxygen. He used his tiredness to gauge how high he was. Quite tired at 17,000. Screaming for air was 18,000 to 18,500. Nearing exhaustion at 19,000. At 19,700 he'd had all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he could take in one day. But he'd arrived at Camp Berlin. In the summer, there was an iron hut here, roofless, more of a landmark than any kind of shelter. He could barely see the tip of its frame poking through the snow. It was located in an excellent spot for avoiding avalanches, however, and Jeremiah wearily began to dig a snow cave into the snow bank that had drifted near to the hut. After an hour of work, he struck the hut's side, and, amazingly, half of its front door. He dug back into the hut a ways more, then paused, his lungs and arms aching. He was very satisfied with his work, and spread his thermal pad and sleeping bag out into the cave. Then, wrapped in his bag, he lit the stove and boiled water for tea and dinner soup. Jeremiah felt very safe and comfortable, despite the cold and the altitude.

Outside, he could see, just over the lip of his cave, that the snow was blood red with the dying embers of the sun. *Practice what you preach, Jeremiah,* he heard a voice say. What the hell? He unzipped his bag and crawled to the entrance. Nobody there, but the mountainside was on fire with the sun. He was dazed by the beauty, and sat for a long time, lost, mesmerized by the play of sun on snow. There were shades to the red, as the contours of the mountain caught the light in different ways. Not what you'd expect. In places, some deep crevasses and gullies were alight, as if a beacon burned within them. On the flat snow, the crystalline ice sparkled, and the spendrift cascade that was always flowing down the mountain blushed nearly pink, looking like scars on the mountain's face. But traveling scars.

And there was someone here, nearby. He could *feel* her presence. *Her.* That voice. Was it Mandy's? It had been so long now. With a deep sadness, he found that he could not remember what she'd sounded like. *Be careful tomorrow,* the voice said. He spun around. Did he catch a glimpse of something, someone? A flash of parka as she turned to leave? Or was it just the shimmering snow? It's the *altitude*, is what it is, he told himself. He slid back into his shelter and pulled his sleeping bag tight around him. He slept fitfully, hearing the voice again and again in his dreams. Sometimes it was Mandy's. But awake, he could not be sure.

When he awoke for the last time, the sky was lightening. Jeremiah had the feeling in his bones that it was going to be a dangerous morning.

Nevertheless, the climbing was not extremely difficult at first. Jeremiah came to steeper sections which had shed their snow and were covered with ice, or bare. The ice was good, for he was a strong ice climber and had a fine technique. He front-pointed up several steep slopes, driving in his ice axes, steadying himself, and then kicking in the tips of his crampons. It looked very dangerous, as if he were stuck to the mountain by the thinnest of margins, and indeed, the blades of the axes and the points of his crampons were less than an inch into the ice. But Jeremiah

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had climbed giant frozen waterfalls using this procedure, and was completely at home with it.

As he neared the summit pyramid, he began to face some exposure, with drops of a half-mile and more to one side or the other. Jeremiah had always been afraid of heights, and that was part of the reason he'd been so attracted to climbing. He found this fear exhilarating, for—after he'd faced it the first time—he knew that it was a fear he could overcome and use.

After Jeremiah was up the ice slope, the going got rougher. The snow and ice slopes, which had been horribly tiring, but straightforward, gave way to seracs—ice and snow blocks as big as Citroëns and shaped not unlike them—and Jeremiah had to pick his way through them carefully. All the time, he was aware that the snow underfoot could shift slightly and one of these blocks could tumble over onto him. He would die. It had happened in the great Icefall near the base of Everest, though never on a team he'd been on. *His* friends seemed to die more spectacularly.

Finally, he was through the worst of this band of seracs and came out upon a slightly flattened area. Another man-made structure, half-destroyed, barely protruded from the snow. It was a shattered A-frame which had once been a hut. Camp Independencia, Parra had called it. Jeremiah decided that this was as good a place as any to take a break. He got out his stove once more and began to brew tea water. He'd had an extraordinary morning so far, climbing a little over 1,200 feet in three hours. "Who took all the fucking *air*?" he said. It was an old joke, a ritual really, which he performed whenever he was over 20,000 feet. He made his tea and sat quietly. His voice had disturbed the silence of the morning, and, with it, some of his repose. He wanted to get that back. Only the gentle hiss of the stove disturbed the quiet. Then came another hiss from far below, the wrenching squeak of ice on ice. A thunderous roar, growing in intensity, as the sound of a car on a gravel road will as it gets closer and closer. What in God's name? Jeremiah walked to the edge of his level resting place and looked down.

Aconcagua was on the move. Ice torrents poured down either side of the mountain, while down its middle a giant section of snow had broken away and was tumbling down, taking everything in its path with it, growing, *growing*. It completely obliterated his path back down, turning it into an unstable mush of snow, ice, and rock. He'd never *seen* an avalanche so huge! He watched and watched, as it rolled on and seemed to never end. He thought of Parra down below, waiting. Even such an avalanche as *this* would probably not make it to the flattened-out area where they'd pitched camp 1. But who could say? This was beyond measurement, beyond belief. What could have caused it?

And how the hell was he going to get back *down*?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After what seemed hours, the icefall subsided. If he had not been climbing as well as he had this morning, if he'd not heeded the strange voice from yesterday, he'd have been a part of that, a corpse, rapidly freezing, lost from sight until the spring thaws. Of course, there was *still* that possibility.

He looked at the summit. Lenticular clouds were forming, space-saucer prophets of storm. Great. More snow's coming. No way down except maybe over the summit and down the other side. To *what*? There were no shepherds in the high valleys at this time of year. He'd perish with no food and no way to melt snow for water. His only hope was that Parra had survived and was waiting for him. He had to find a way down to him. But first, he had to survive the coming storm.

Having thought the situation through, he felt better. He had all afternoon. He could dig a cozy snow cave here in that time on this relatively flat ledge. Its position should protect it from avalanches. But, Christ, how could he tell? There was no precedent that he knew of for the way this mountain had behaved.

He began to dig, and was just finishing up the cave when the first snow began to fall. He crawled inside, made a cup of tea, then settled into his sleeping bag. It might be a long wait. Hours, if he were lucky. Days, if he weren't. With the way things had gone so far today, he'd better count on the latter. He would have to conserve food and fuel, but even with miserly rations, he had only enough to last two more days. It was far more important to keep drinking than to eat, so he sorted out all the food which required rehydration and threw it away. He hated to leave trash on the mountain, but . . . ah hell, he picked the packets back up. He might die, but he wouldn't die a litterbug. His mother had taught him that much.

Jeremiah began to feel a deep longing to see his parents once again. It had been years now. And his sister in California, even longer. Good middle-class folks.

How did somebody like *me* get strained out of these genes? he wondered. He'd gone to a fine copy of a fine Eastern private school. Seen what there was to be had by the rich and influential, and was none too impressed. And so he'd applied his ambitions elsewhere.

What a neat analysis. It had more open crevasses than a glacier in August. Living in the South seemed so long ago, so far away. It had no hold on him anymore. He was free. That was the thing, to let go of the past and be free. Except there was Charlie, his Texas connection. Charlie wouldn't let go. And Mandy. He could never let go of Mandy, no matter how far he fell into the future and she, like an immovable stone, remained fixed in the past, set there forever. And Ánalia? What subtle ropes attached him to Ánalia?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Outside, the wind was howling like a bear caught in a foot trap. *Like the scream of a woman falling through space.* Soon, however, snow covered the entrance hole, and the sound abated. Jeremiah slept in fits and starts. He had many dreams of falling.

In the morning, he broke out into the sunlight and found that the storm had passed. Aconcagua was blanketed with a snow coating almost as thick as the one it had had before yesterday's avalanche. Still, the path down looked impassible, ready to come loose and avalanche again. The mountainside could remain like this for some time, for weeks even. He tried to think of other ways out of his predicament, and grew anxious with himself. For the first time, he was afraid. Before, there had been just too much amazement. But anxiety was useless. What the hell could he *do*?

He could climb *up*. There was that. He scanned the summit pyramid. Its exposed rock was whitish-gray, as if the rock itself were suffering from frostbite. This was icing, but should be relatively crumbly. It was too cold for a coating of verglas—the enemy of the climber trying to negotiate rock—to develop. There were many cliffs on the pyramid which were dangerously corniced with snow—snow that could give at any time and sweep him down the mountainside along with it. He could just make out the route which Parra had suggested, up a small gully which cut up into the summit pyramid like a ready-made ramp. It was called the Canaleta.

Without really deciding to do so, Jeremiah found himself climbing upward. After so many mountains, it was an old habit, an instinct which took over when one was not thinking or could not think. He climbed. That was what he did.

Within a couple of hours, he was at the Canaleta. This was not going to be as easy as he'd supposed it would be. The slope was moderate, but rock and ice cannonballs shot down it at random intervals. For once in his climbing career, he wished he'd brought a helmet. But a helmet would do him little good against one of *those* suckers anyway. The trick was to be lucky and not get hit. Not a very sound technique. Jeremiah studied the falling stone and ice more carefully. There was a pattern to it, albeit a convoluted one. Stationary boulders were placed in strategic locations all the way up the ramp. If he could shuffle from boulder to boulder, only exposing himself to the falling shit on the traverses *between* rocks . . . it wasn't a perfect plan, but it would increase his chances greatly. And the floor of the gully was mostly ice, too steep for snow to collect. He could use his ice-climbing skills to full advantage. So. Start.

The first few traverses were easy and eventless, but as he got higher, the boulders got smaller and provided less protection. Once, a cannonball rock slammed directly into the boulder Jeremiah was sheltering behind.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He ducked, but part of his back was exposed, and he was stung with the broken shrapnel of the exploded cannonball. He shook off the pain and skirted to a better shelter. And finally, he was up and *out,* over to one side of the gully. He was on the final ridge.

And the rest was easy. He climbed steadily through deep snow, which got harder and shallower as he got near the summit. When he crested the mountain, he was walking almost normally—except for the inch-long spikes on his feet.

There was an aluminum cross which marked the highest point on the summit; it was half-buried in snow. Jeremiah rammed in one of his ice axes and afixed his camera to a screw atop the ax. He flipped the self-timer button, jogged over to stand by the cross. The jogging left him winded and panting hard. The camera clicked. He went and set it again and got another. Proof. Okay. He finally took a good look around.

To the north and south, there was a sea of mountains which disappeared into the distance. To the east was a falling line which led ultimately to Mendoza. To Ánalia. To the west was Chile. All of the mountain peaks were below him, as far as he could see. Jeremiah Fall was standing on the highest point of land in the Western Hemisphere. 22,835 feet. Western Man, on top of the West.

From his daypack, Jeremiah took out the butterfly mosaic. It glimmered in the sun. Here's to us, Ánalia. Here's to a taste of the warm South, even in winter time. Jeremiah set the mosaic down next to the aluminum cross. He backed away, started to take a picture of it.

No. He felt the female presence again, heard a voice and saw a flickering, just on the edge of his vision. It could have been the altitude, the lack of oxygen. *You'll need that,* said the voice.

"What do you mean?" he found himself saying. The wind carried his words away, over to the west, out toward Chile. "Tell me what you mean."

You'll need it on Everest.

"I'm not going there. I'm never going back there. People *die* when I go there."

But the presence was gone. *She* was gone.

Jeremiah was utterly alone.

With a bewildered heart, Jeremiah retrieved the picture and began his descent. Now was the time when the most concentration, the most care, was needed. He tried to free his mind of all thoughts but climbing down. To where? At least to Camp Independencia. He could hole up there. For how long? Three days. Maybe longer. And then? The way down might be easier. But no. That was no ordinary avalanche. It would take a long time for the mountain to restabilize after *that* one.

A cannonball rock caromed past. It barely missed taking Jeremiah's head off. Shit. Pay attention. Once, coming down the Canaleta's final

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

run, he slipped and fell. This was bad, for he would accelerate rapidly on the ice and shoot out of the run so fast it would send him tumbling down the mountain. With expert movement, he got himself turned right and used his ice ax to self-arrest. On ice, the procedure was delicate and required experience, else one could start spinning completely out of control. He dug in the blade and bottom spike of the ax and barely grazed the forepoints of his crampons against the ice, applying just enough pressure to keep him from sliding on past the ice ax, but not enough to stop him short and spin him around upside down. It worked, and he was lucky—for the fall had carried him nearly out of the Canaleta. He rose shakily and got all the way out as quickly as he could. *Shoom* went a block of ice, shooting past right after he'd gotten out of the way. The Canaleta was a bad place, and he was glad to be rid of it.

From this point, climbing down was easier. Still, he had to be careful, for there was no one but himself to arrest him if he started falling, and the self-arrest on the Canaleta had taken much of the strength from his arms. He doubted he could stop himself again. Noon was nearing when he got back to Camp Independencia with its wrecked A-frame. He had decided what to do. Looking over the edge, the avalanche remains appeared as dangerous as ever. Yet there was a line of descent he could imagine which would skirt the worst of the debris—provided he could find his route once he was down there.

Everest. The voice had said he was going to Everest. That had to mean he would make it down off this hill, didn't it? Christ, I'm listening to voices in my *head* for advice now, he thought. It wasn't funny, and he didn't laugh. *Was* he going to Everest, then? Had the inarticulate right side of his brain decided that he was going and provided him with a prophetic voice to inform him of that decision? A rational explanation. He doubted it immediately.

What I *really* hate is standing here undecided, Jeremiah thought, freezing my ass off. I feel strong. I'm climbing well. I want to *do* something. He imagined what staying here for several days would do to him. First he would dehydrate after his fuel ran out and he could no longer melt snow. Or he'd try to eat snow, and die from hypothermia. If he didn't die, he'd be forced to descend in weakened condition, and he truly did not believe that the climbing conditions below were going to get any better.

"I'm going," Jeremiah said, as if, by speaking aloud, his decision would somehow be recorded, known—whatever the outcome. First, Jeremiah made himself a cup of hot tea. Then he sorted his equipment. He left behind his stove, food, and fuel, taking only his camera, ice axes, and sleeping bag. If he did not make it all the way down, he might need to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bivouac one more night. He'd die without his sleeping bag, of that he was sure. "*Okay,*" he said, and started down.

The going was incredibly complex, with a mixture of snow, ice, and rock which changed composition with each step, and none of which was stable. He found himself slipping and sliding down stretches that were nearly vertical. Only by taking long loping steps for yards on end, partially out of control, was he able to retain his balance and not fall on down the hill to his death. Jeremiah tried to follow a diagonal which avoided the main line of the avalanche, but found seracs and plain old boulders constantly blocking his way. As a consequence, he had to zigzag downward, trying desperately to work his way to the left side of the avalanche's primary path.

But, midway down, he came upon a line of rising stone and ice that could not be surmounted. Jeremiah tried to work his way in or around the barrier, but there was just no way. He was boxed into the most dangerous place he could be, and could do nothing about it. In fear and despair, Jeremiah turned back to his right, and descended the surface of the avalanche.

The day progressed, and he ground his way onward, downward. He hoped that the setting of the sun and the general cooling off which followed would harden the snow a bit, decrease the chances for a major breakaway. But there was no guarantee. He climbed downward.

As the sun set behind the western peaks, Jeremiah realized that he had left his headlamp back at Independencia, in his daypack. There was nothing he could do about that, either. As blackness filled the sky, he continued his descent. The darkness seemed to be sapping him of his will, as if it were creeping into his soul as it was creeping across the West. He'd just been to the top of the West, and had felt a kind of semi-mystic identification with it. Would the night descent on him before he could descend the mountain? Slipping and sliding, afraid that each new step would be his last, Jeremiah kept climbing down.

And the moon rose. This was immensely cheering to Jeremiah, for now the moon was practically full. He began to see better, and picked up his pace a little. Then he was off of the rock-and-ice mixture, and onto pure snow. The going got tougher. He was slogging through. Jeremiah could no longer feel his feet, and was certain that his toes were frostbitten. This was a shame, for he'd always thought his feet were one of the better parts of his body, and he'd had a special fondness for his toes. Probably they would have to come off. If he lived long enough to have that to worry about. He pushed on.

And thought he saw, far below—a light. But then it was gone, and he was sure that he was mistaken. Then, there it was *again,* far, far below. Was it Parra, in the tent with a candle lantern? As if in answer, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

light flickered, then came back on. Oh God, oh God sweet Jesus, let it be.

That was when he heard the roar coming from above him.

He couldn't see a thing. Running downward was impossible in the deep snow. All he could do was stand and wait for the avalanche to bear him away. He was going to die with a blank, bewildered mind.

Jeremiah didn't have long to wait. Within seconds, the snow was upon him. He was swept up like a stick in an ocean wave and spit out onto the avalanche surface. But soon he was rolling, being turned under again. There was something you could do. Something you did in an avalanche. No guarantee. A last hope. But he couldn't think, couldn't remember.

Suddenly, the presence was there again, rolling along with him, speaking a wordless calm. Then a word. *Swim*, she said. Yes. That was it! You kick your legs, you flail your arms; you pretend you're swimming. You *are* swimming, swimming through snow. Jeremiah swam. Swam the American crawl, like the *norteamericano* that he was.

> *I sailed to Antarctica in order to climb Mt. Vinson, the highest peak on that continent. I climbed it alone out of necessity, but I would have done so anyway. For I was in mourning for a lost love, and I had thoughts of throwing myself off into that desolate wasteland. But with every step up the mountain, every plunge of my ax into the snow, I was healing. I was healing. And that is the reason I went to Antarctica, and the reason I sailed there alone, and the reason I climbed. The reason I climb. For there is a wound in me which seeing the mountains opened long ago, that seeing death on the mountains reopens often enough. And the only cure is climbing. I can only find healing for this wound in the highest of places.*
>
> *—from "Still Life at the Bottom of the World"*

And he was swimming, and turning his head for air, and breathing, breathing, and churning, kicking, *swimming*. Then slowly, slowly, the avalanche subsided, struck a deal with gravity to hold for this one time, to hold. And Jeremiah came to rest. He lay there for a long time, face-down in the snow. Then he heard something, a humming sound, a human sound.

He picked himself up. Not five hundred yards away was camp 1, and the glowing aura of the tent. Jeremiah stood up and walked down to camp. As he grew nearer, he could hear the whistling hiss of a stove. He quickened his pace. After his eyes got used to the brighter light, he could see Parra, sitting half in the tent, but with the stove outside, heating water. Parra looked up at him and nearly turned the stove over and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spilled everything, but regained himself. He smiled in the huge way that only Argentinians had.

"I'm back," said Jeremiah.

"Yes," said Parra. "And I'll have your tea in a moment. Did you know there was a big earthquake?"

The huge avalanche, thought Jeremiah. *That* was the cause. That, or an aftershock. There were two avalanches.

"If I could feel it all the way up here," Parra said, "It must have hit Mendoza *hard*."

And all at once, Jeremiah knew where the voice had come from, to whom it belonged. Not to Mandy. Or at least, not to Mandy alone. The longer he lived, the deeper the hurt—and the higher the mountains must be. Suddenly not only his feet were numb, his whole body was numb, his soul was numb. He whispered a name. It came out choked and dry, as if his throat were full of autumn leaves.

"Ánalia." ●

DEFEATED BY BACTERIA

You are so small,
smaller than the eye
of a mosquito whose color
I cannot see, and yet
you have triumphed.
You have taxed and oppressed me
in every province
of my body, and even
if at last I throw off
my chains and cry freedom,
still, you will have lived
thousands of generations,
and established an empire
that filled your whole universe!
Bacteria, I tremble,
I groan beneath the weight
of your history.

—David Lunde

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Megadimensional with Mefaglap

Aristoi

By Walter Jon Williams

Tor, $22.95

The setting for Walter Jon Williams' *Aristoi* is one of those glamorous interstellar futures inhabited by a perfected humanity with all sorts of interesting variations living in a Logarchy divided into realms of varying numbers of star systems. These are ruled by the Aristoi, the *creme de la creme* of humanity as determined by tests, achievements, and every other criterion of the advanced science of the day.

However, the Logarchy is not just physical space; there is also the Hyperlogos, aka the Realized World, aka the oneirochronon (I think). This can probably be best explained by the third paragraph in the novel, concerning the capital of the reconstructed Earth[2] (Earth[1] was chewed up by "mataglap nano," a nasty Indonesian experiment gone wrong): "(The reconstructed) Persepolis, in the Realized World, was an interesting artifact. It shaded by degrees into 'Persepolis,' the real place becoming, through its illusory/electronic deeps and towers, an ever-flexible, ever-unfolding megadimensional dream." Also in the oneirochronic world can exist the simulacra of persons long dead. As you can see, this opens the way for endless surprises.

But that's not all. You become aware very soon that there seem to be a lot more characters in the novel than there are people, even counting the late lamented. This can be confusing until you realize that all the best people have developed their multiple personalities to realize the full potential of their talents. These others are called daimones (with full awareness of the relationship with demons, as in possessed by—they can take over whenever the prime personality wills), and they are stored in the reno's holographic memory. Oh, yes, the renos. They are personal AIs, which can be allowed to develop their own personalities. And I almost forgot to mention the skiagenos (the plural might be skiagenoi—my Greek is rusty), which are the artificial bodies that can be created and used in various places where you aren't. (There are portions of the novel printed in double columns, one of which is essentially devoted to external affairs or conversations counterpointed in the other by interior conversations among the daimones.)

As you can see, I've used the amount of space usually devoted to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a whole review simply to give a simple (?) precis of this novel's background. This does not give me much space for an extended examination of the plot. However, I can't resist telling you that the opening section of the novel deals with the protagonist Gabriel supervising the impregnation of his lover (male) with their first child while at the same time attending a gathering of the Aristoi in Persepolis.

From there, I can but say that the Logarchy, as you can see, gives plenty of room for intrigue and skullduggery, with multiple illusions and personalities going, and that Williams takes full advantage of all of it. He does a remarkable job of keeping persons and personalities straight (as it were—pansexuality seems to be the rule) while involving them in the murder of an Aristoi (unheard of) by metaglap nano (yech) that leads to the revelation of a plot that (what else?) threatens the Logarchy itself. And he does this while throwing out all sorts of wonderful concepts, large and small. (Perhaps my favorite is the transparent ceiling'd bedroom in a house held by reverse gravity over a waterfall, so you lie in bed and watch the waterfall fall up.)

Ghosts and Goblins

The Goblin Mirror

By C. J. Cherryh
Del Rey, $19

Fairly recently, C. J. Cherryh has abandoned the Celtic background for her fantasies (which were wonderful) and moved eastward into Central Europe. While the latest, *The Goblin Mirror*, is nonspecific in locale in the broader sense, the small state in which the novel begins and from whence come most of the principal human characters is called Maggiar, there's reference to "Russ" not that far off, and the characters have names such as Karoly, all of which lends a Hungarian flavor.

The Lord of Maggiar has three sons, which seems almost too traditional. The eldest, Bogdan, is indeed the jock type that eldest sons so often are, but the role of protagonist is split between the middle son, Tamas, who is imaginative and retiring, and the spirited fourteen-year-old Yuri. After a winter in which there has been too much game, too many furs taken, and an imbalance of nature is obviously in the works, the court wizard, Karoly, announces he must seek out his sister over-mountain. This is almost *terra incognita* to the Maggiars, though the Lord's mother had come from there, bringing Karoly with her. Bogdan and Tamas are assigned to guide and guard the old man, much to Yuri's indignation. When Tamas's dog escapes and follows him, Yuri, who has been entrusted with the care of the dog, uses this excuse to follow also.

The little band discovers, too late, that the over-mountain disruption is an invasion of goblins. Attacked, they are separated (with Yuri and trusty dog just behind) and combine into various parties. Bogdan seems to have fallen in battle. Tamas is saved by a troll (supposedly an inimical race, but really far from it) and taken to Ela, the apprentice of Karoly's witch sister who has been killed. Yuri finds Karoly and the wise old hunt-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing master, Nicolai. From there, each faction muddles into darkness, with Yuri searching for both brothers and Tamas hoping to find Bogdan. The supernatural folks are anything but informative. Ela is oblique, to say the least, particularly about the fragment of magical mirror she salvages. A goblin prince that they fall in with may or may not be a rebel against the goblin queen. The trolls communicate in words of one syllable. The ghosts of witch queens past are encountered (variously named Ylena, Ytresse, Ylisse, and Ysabel, which doesn't help). Even Karoly is slow to explain anything. So through most of the book the reader is as mystified as Yuri and Tamas. This is partially made up for by the suspense and the evocative atmosphere—whether it all falls into place at the end is a matter of question. I liked the trolls myself—they're sort of damp mops just smaller than haystacks and quite endearing.

Periodically Encyclopedic

Futures Past
Edited by Jim Emerson
The Right Answer, $5 an issue, $20 per year (PO Box 610, Convoy OH 45832)

Here's something away from the usual. *Futures Past*, edited by Jim Emerson, and subtitled "a visual guidebook to science fiction history" is a periodical (six issues a year) which, if collected rigorously, will turn into a neat reference "encyclopedia." This is one of those ideas which seems a bit off the wall at first, but after seeing the first two issues, I can but wish it the best of luck and hope that for once, something this original will work.

The major factor is that each issue is devoted to a year "in the life of" SF. The initial issue is 1926, the second obviously 1927. Why begin with 1926? Because that's when Hugo Gernsback (as in "the Hugo") started *Amazing Stories*. (Did you know that HG was a Luxembourgeois? Now you have an answer as to what has Luxembourg given to the world.) This started SF on its way to becoming a genre and eventually a mass medium.

Each issue has a chronology of the year's mainstream events and events of importance in SF ("Richard Matheson is born," "First issue of *Amazing Stories* hits stands," etc.). It has a list of books in the field published that year and a list of films, all with summaries and pertinent reference information. (I can see that getting out of hand in later years. Perhaps more than one issue will have to be devoted to, say, 1990.) There are pertinent articles (on Gernsback and *Amazing*, in this instance) as well as bibliographies galore. There's a "First Contact," the first published story by a to-be-well-known author, in this case Curt Siodmak (technically his first English language story), engagingly titled "The Eggs From Lake Tanganyika" and a profile of Siodmak as well. For the graphically inclined, several glorious pages of period art by the great Frank R. Paul. And so on. The magazine is b&w, neatly printed, and the first issues run to forty-four and sixty pages respectively. From all appearances, it will be indexed out of its mind as a reference tool. So, good luck, *Futures Past*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

May you reach 2000 *by* 2000 (that doesn't quite work out, but you know what I mean).

London Fog

The Werewolves of London

By Brian Stableford
Carroll & Graf, $21

I was hoping that Brian Stableford would do for werewolves in his latest lengthy creation, *The Werewolves of London* (the first of a trilogy to boot), what he did for vampires in his last novel, *The Empire of Fear*, which was essentially to fashion a whole alternate history around them. That novel was certainly epic, and while it had its plodding moments, the grandiose idea more than carried it.

Alas, the new one is mostly plod. Not only plod, but enigmatic plod at that. We critics/reviewers are, of course, supposed to be omniscient; one of the rules is to never, never say you don't understand something, but I'm afraid in all fairness that I must admit to being mystified by much of this book.

It opens like a mummy movie. Three nineteenth-century Englishman have been lured to a forsaken, predynastic site in Egypt by a mysterious monk. There the youngest, Lydyard, is snake bit, and sinks into a coma of strange delusions. The others manage to raise *something*. The eldest, Tallentyre, survives; the other man disappears and the monk is killed. Tallentyre only has memories of a weird sphinx-like being.

For the next three hundred or so pages, nothing much happens. A new-to-the-narrative orphan named Gabriel (loaded moniker) escapes from a Dickensian orphanage run by a wicked widow and her sadistic son, where the children are taught by the Sisters of St. Syncletica (I checked my hagiography. Not!). One of the Sisters is well on her way to sainthood (she floats). Gabriel is lured away by the beautiful Morwenna, one of the werewolves of London (remember them?—they're in the title). There's the sorcerer Harkender who is accompanied throughout the first part of the novel by one of London's chief bawds for no apparent good reason except to introduce us to his supremely unattractive sexual practices which are apparently part of his spiritual growth. Since their student days, Tallentyre has argued the case of reason against Harkender's advocacy of a mutable, magical universe. Harkender is apparently Gabriel's father; the boy was conceived in that spot in Egypt where our original party met misadventure and he is not quite human. He was conceived to be an informational seer for Harkender. Lydyard (remember—the snake-bit?) is having prophetic visions and is also becoming a seer, much to his alarm and that of his beloved Cordelia, daughter of Tallentyre. Then there's the Order of St. Amycus, a satyr (mythical type, not sex fiend) who was sainted in the fourth century, and Pelorus, a renegade werewolf of London. The sphinx shows up again and . . .

But mostly there's endless talk, talk, talk, as everybody tries to find out something—*any*thing—from everybody else (not to mention various prophetic visions in italics, mostly of a chained, heroic Satan); I rapidly lost track. I could go on, but it would only confuse

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

matters. The werewolves steal Lydyard, and eventually everybody goes to Hell (literally) (I think), and some return, including Lydyard with Cordelia.

Definitions vary, but from my point of view, this foggy novel is not fantasy, certainly not SF, not even horror. I would call it fictional metaphysics, or mysticism, if you will.

Italian Gothic

Fantastic Tales

By I. U. Tarchetti, edited and translated by Lawrence Venuti
Mercury House, $25

Lawrence Venuti has provided the first translation into English of stories by I. U. Tarchetti, the first writer of Gothic tales in Italian. He lived his short life (twenty-nine years) in the middle of the nineteenth century; it is ironic that it took this long for any of his stories to make their way into English since he himself was a translator from the English. This accounts for the great influence (and sometimes more than just influence) on his work by Poe and Mary Shelley. He was, in fact, something of a plagiarist—a work published in 1865 with his byline, "The Immortal Mortal (From the English)" was very close indeed to Shelley's "The Mortal Immortal." Venuti, in fact, includes two stories not by Tarchetti to demonstrate the similarity to two of those by Tarchetti.

The tales as a whole are typically period Gothic. "The Legends of the Black Castle," for instance, incorporate memories and dreams of past and future; "A Spirit in a Raspberry" has a young Baron possessed by a murdered girl's spirit on eating a berry from a bush that grows from her grave; "The Letter U" gives us a madman's horror at the appearance and sound of the letter U and its eventual consequence in the murder of his wife Ursula. This book would be of interest only to those of antiquarian and offbeat taste save that its unusual production makes it a special publication. Its length is longer in proportion to its width than most books (an always pleasing ratio), its binding is handsome and there are splendid illustrations by Jim Pearson for each of the Tarchetti stories.

An Award of Merritt

The Moon Pool

By A. Merritt
Carroll & Graf, $4.94 (paper)

Yes, another review of a reprint by the master fantasist of the early part of this century, A. Merritt. This is perhaps his most celebrated work, *The Moon Pool* (the short story, "The Moon Pool," and the short sequel novelette, "Conquest of the Moon Pool" combined). Okay, I've reviewed every one of the recent flood of reprints of his works, but I want to do my bit to see that they don't disappear into OP limbo as they had done in the last decade.

But I'll make this brief. I'll just tempt you with some people, places, and things, limned in Merritt's lushly jeweled prose. There is the Dweller in the Moon Pool, hidden in the cyclopean ruins of Ponape in the Pacific. There is Muria, a lost (and decadent) civilization in the caverns in the Pacific from which the Moon was torn. In Merritt's formula, the wicked woman is Yolara of Muria, Priestess of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Shining One (and nobody to cross, believe me); the good girl (on the side of the intruders from our world) is Lakla, the Handmaiden, whose servants are the intelligent batrachian race, the Akka, and whose masters are the Silent Ones, the three aliens whose rebellious creation the Dweller is (and these are aliens as aliens *should* be). I won't mention the jungle of deadly fungi, or the scarlet underground sea, or the shell-like antigrav vehicles of the Murians. Tempted? So get out there and buy it and keep Merritt in print. (Don't bother to write. I know I have no objectivity about this author.)

Shoptalk

Anthologies, etc. . . . The fourth in the series that's the alternate-reality lovers' delight, "What Might Have Been," is *Alternate Americas* edited by Gregory Benford and Martin H. Greenberg (Bantam, $4.99, paper). . . . From the ever-fertile mind of Mike Resnick (wearing his editor's hat) comes the wittily but inevitably titled *Whatdunits*. If you can't guess what the theme of these stories is, don't look to me for help (DAW, $4.99, paper).

Peripheralia . . . From Jennifer Roberson, *Lady of the Forest*, a not-quite-fantasy novel based on those not-quite fantasy legends about Robin Hood, Maid Marian, and the other homeless of the Forest called Sherwood. But it's long and involved enough so that only the deepest-dyed fantasy addict will complain, I should think (Zebra, $22).

Reprints, etc. . . . A. Merritt's *The Face In the Abyss*, which I reviewed some months back as a limited hard-cover edition with my above-mentioned lack of objectivity, is now available to you lucky readers in paperback. So avail, avail! (Collier, $9, paper). . . . Also newly republished is what is arguably Brian Aldiss' best work, or the first third of it, anyhow: the monumental *Helliconia Spring*, the first of the monumental "Helliconia trilogy" (Collier, $12, paper).

Recent publications from those associated with this magazine include: *Geodesic Dreams: The Best Short Fiction of Gardner Dozois*, with an introduction by Robert Silverberg (St. Martin's, $19.95).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to **Baird Searles, 1393 rue La Fontaine, Montréal, Québec, H2L 1T6, Canada.** ●

Customer Service or Subscriber Assistance. Please direct all changes of address and subscription questions to: Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 7058, Red Oak, IA 51591.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Marketplace

IA FEBRUARY '93

ASIMOV/ANALOG combination CLASSIFIED AD rate is $6.70 per word—payable in advance—($100.50 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to Judy Dorman, DELL MAGAZINES, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10168-0035.

ART AND DESIGN

FOR INFORMATION, REGARDING PRINTS, POSTERS, AND OTHER ITEMS FEATURING THE ARTWORK OF MICHAEL WHELAN, PLEASE CONTACT: GLASS ONION GRAPHICS, PO Box 88, Brookfield, CT 06804, Call or Fax (203) 798-6063.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

Bargain Books

Save up to 80% on publisher's overstocks, imports, remainders. Choose from up to 8,000 titles including 600-1,500 new arrivals each month! **Science Fiction,** Biography, History, Art, Politics, Literature, Nature, Cooking, – something for everyone. Fast shipment, moneyback guarantee. Write for **FREE CATALOG**

Hamilton Box 15-773, Falls Village, CT 06031

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265.

MANUSCRIPTS WANTED, all types. Company with 70-year tradition. "Authors Guide to Subsidy Publishing." 1-800-695-9599.

CATALOGS AND DIRECTORIES

BEST selection of DRAGONS AVAILABLE! Sculptures, T-Shirts, Stationery, Rubber Stamps and Much More. Full color catalog $2.00. Dancing Dragon Designs, Dept. AN, 5670 West End Rd#4, Arcata, CA 95521.

PERSONAL

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE BRITISH GENTLEMEN seek friendship, romance & marriage with American ladies & gentlemen! All ages! Free details: ENGLISH ROSE INTRODUCTION AGENCY. (Dept. D/P). 2nd Floor, Mill Lane House, Mill Lane, Margate, Kent. ENGLAND TEL: 01144-843-290735.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME RADIO PROGRAMS. Great Science Fiction! Also, mysteries, comedies, westerns. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm. New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

In The Future. . .

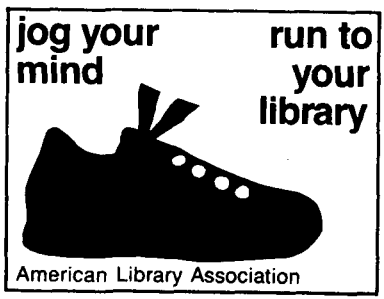
YOUR

Classified/Display

AD CAN BE PLACED HERE

For details:

SF CLASSIFIED
380 Lexington Ave.
New York, NY 10017
(212) 856-6307



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

Only a few new con(vention)s to add at the end of February, but some changed contact points. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at Box 3343, Fairfax VA 22038. The hot line is (703) 2SF-DAYS (273-3297). If a machine answers (with a list of the weekend's cons), leave a message and I'll call back on my nickel. When calling cons, give your name and reason for calling right off. When writing, send an SASE. Look for me behind the Filthy Pierre badge.

JANUARY 1993

8-10—**TropiCon.** For info, write: **Box 70143, Ft. Lauderdale FL 33307**. Or phone: **(407) 793-7581** (10 A.M. to 10 P.M., not collect). Con will be held in: West Palm Beach FL (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Airport Holiday Inn. Guests will include: Bova, Clement, Ciencin, Fontenay, Wilber.

8-10—**Winter Fantasy. (414) 248-3625.** Milwaukee WI. RPGA-sanctioned & other role-playing gaming.

15-17—**RustyCon. (206) 938-4844.** Seattle WA. Roger Zelazny, Phil Foglio, John Cramer, Greg Cox.

15-17—**ChattaCon. (404) 578-8461, or 591-9322, or 623-0579.** Read House, Chattanooga TN. G. Cook.

15-17—**Arisia. (617) 270-9794.** Park Plaza Hotel, Boston MA. E. Kushner, C. Lang, W. Snow-Lang.

22-24—**ConFusion, Box 8284, Ann Arbor MI 48107, (313) 429-3475.** Days Hotel, Southfield MI. Sims.

22-24—**ConFurence, Box 1958, Garden Grove CA 92642. (714) 530-1312.** Anaheim CA. Funny animals.

29-Feb. 1—**RadiCon, Box 322, Bentleigh VIC 3204, Australia. (11 61 3) 557-7088.** In Melbourne.

FEBRUARY 1993

5-7—***UK SF Folksinging Con, 3 W. Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol BS6 6SZ, UK. (0272) 737-418.***

5-7—**PsurrealCon, Box 2069, Norman OK 73070.** Two to three hundred usually attend this convention.

5-7—**Winterfest, Box 1252, Claremont CA 91711. (800) 266-3111.** Victorville CA. Model-rocket meet.

12-14—**VisionCon, 1375 S. National Ave., Springfield MO 65804. (417) 863-1155.** Media and gaming

12-14—**CostumeCon, 200 N. Homewood Ave., Pittsburgh PA 15232. (412) 242-8837.** For masqueraders

19-21—**Boskone, Box 809, Framingham MA 01701. (617) 625-2311.** Framingham MA. Joe Haldeman T. Kidd, B. Meacham.

19-21—**StauntonCon, % Blair Grimm, 2608 Marr St. NW, Roanoke VA 24012.** Staunton VA. Media con

19-21—**Total ConFusion, % Mark Dowdy, Box 1463, Worcester MA 01607. (508) 987-1530.** Gaming

26-28—**RadCon, % E. & N. Lincoln, 104 Comstock, Richland WA 99352. (509) 943-0845.** Gaming

26-28—**Gallifrey, Box 3021, N. Hollywood CA 91609. (714) 540-9884.** Burbank CA. Dr. Who. Levene

SEPTEMBER 1993

2-6—**ConFrancisco, 712 Bancroft Rd. 1993, Walnut Creek CA 94598. (510) 945-1993.** WorldCon in SF

SEPTEMBER 1994

1-5—**ConAdian, Box 2430, Winnipeg MB R3C 4A7. (204) 942-3427 (fax).** WorldCon. C$95 US$85.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OVER 50% OFF DURING OUR FIRST ANTHOLOGY WAREHOUSE SALE!

Our warehouse is full -- full of classic science fiction anthologies from **Analog Science Fiction & Fact** and **Asimov's Science Fiction** magazines. We need to make room for new books -- that's why we're having our anthology warehouse sale. For only $17.95 plus $3.00 postage and handling, we will send you an assortment of 9 classic science fiction anthologies. That's less than $2.00 a book and less than half the original price.

Please send your check or money order for $22.95 (no COD's please) to:

Science Fiction Anthologies
P.O. Box 40
Vernon, NJ 07462

Please be sure to include your name and address.

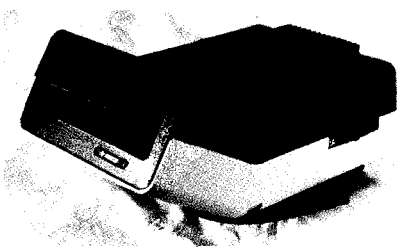
While we cannot accommodate requests for specific anthologies, we guarantee that you will be delighted with your surprise assortment. Also, at this great price, these anthologies will make wonderful gifts for your science-fiction-loving friends.

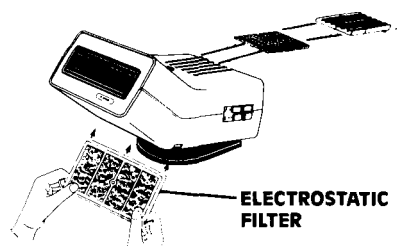
Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Available only in U.S. MRNA-0

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

▼ BREATHE EASIER WITH THE AIR PROCESSOR

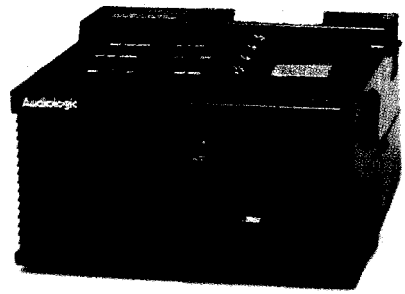
Clean air is vital to overall good health and general well-being and there is growing concern about the quality of the air around us. Amcor's Air Processor is uniquely designed to remove indoor air pollution and improve air quality. This compact unit has a high voltage generator that produces negatively charged ions that clean the air of cigarette/cigar smoke, dust, pollen, fungal and bacterial particles as well as a host of other allergy stimuli. The Air Processor also features a blower for air circulation and a unique filter that is permanent and washable. Includes a free Ionoscope that detects the negative ions emitted from the ion generator and proves that it is functioning. Very quiet so it is perfect for any room in your house. UL listed. **$99.98** ($6.50) #A2002.





★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

▼ SLEEP SOUNDLY WITH SOUND SLEEPER



Is noise pollution interfering with your ability to get a good night's sleep? If so, then the Sound Sleeper by Audiologic is the clock radio of your dreams. Sound Sleeper combines a state of the art AM/FM cassette clock radio with the benefits of natural sound conditioning. Sound Sleeper lets you fall asleep to the sounds of ocean surf, rushing waterfalls and/or rainfall with the flip of a switch. After a relaxing night's sleep, wake up with a buzzer or music from the radio or cassette. So why have an ordinary clock radio when you can have the cassette clock radio that not only wakes you up but also lulls you to sleep! **$89.98** ($5.50) #A2000.

TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL** Dept. 023 AS; PO Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-722-9999**. NJ residents add 7% sales tax. We honor MasterCard, Visa, and American Express. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1991
1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED